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ABSTRACT

The Parents' Fair Share Demonstration (PFS) was created to boost the incomes of poor noncustodial parents (most of them fathers) so as to increase child support payments and decrease the number of welfare recipients. This report gives the results of a nine-site pilot program, which operated from early 1992 through 1993. The program addressed two fundamental questions: (1) Would the child support enforcement and job training systems be able to work together and implement this complex and innovative program? and (2) Would the noncustodial parent actively participate in light of their hostility to a child support enforcement system? While many sites experienced operational difficulties, especially a lack of on-the-job training positions, the programs enrolled more than 4,000 noncustodial parents. Two-thirds of them participated in program activities, with most of the others having found jobs on their own or having been referred back to the courts for further enforcement. The heart of the program centered on the peer support sessions, with sometimes dramatic positive changes in attitudes and behavior being reported by both participants and staff. Parents in the program defied stereotypes of apathy while officials in the child support enforcement system became enthusiastic advocates of the program's potential. (RJM)

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MATCHING OPPORTUNITIES TO OBLIGATIONS:

Lessons for Child Support Reform from the Parents' Fair Share Pilot Phase

Dan Bloom
Kay Sherwood

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MATCHING OPPORTUNITIES TO OBLIGATIONS:

LESSONS FOR CHILD SUPPORT REFORM FROM THE PARENTS' FAIR SHARE PILOT PHASE

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Manpower Demonstration
Research Corporation

April 1994

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The Authors

PREFACE

Any successful effort to cut the welfare rolls and reduce child poverty will require a sharp increase in child support payments. However, getting tough with nonpaying fathers of children who receive welfare – particularly those who do not work steadily in the mainstream economy – is often difficult because many of these fathers say they are unemployed and unable to pay. Some are telling the truth and need help finding jobs. Others are hiding income by working off the books. However, judges and child support enforcement agencies are often hard-pressed to sort out the truth. As a result, child support agencies often avoid pursuing nonpayers unless there is clear evidence that they are working, which means that many cases involving children on welfare receive only limited attention.

The Parents' Fair Share Demonstration (PFS) was created to address this problem. It is the first large-scale effort to boost the incomes of poor noncustodial parents (the great majority of them fathers) and thereby to increase child support payments. In so doing, it extends to noncustodial parents the vision of mutual obligations and opportunities central to recent welfare reforms: Parents – both parents – are expected to support their children to the extent possible, while government is expected to provide them with services to help them do so.

The PFS approach centers on four core activities: employment and training services (such as job search assistance and on-the-job training); peer support through group discussions focused on the rights and responsibilities of noncustodial parents; stronger and more flexible child support enforcement so that, for example, support orders are temporarily lowered while people participate in the program; and mediation services to help resolve conflicts between the custodial and noncustodial parents. Integrating these diverse activities into a single program called for unprecedented cooperation among numerous state, local, and community agencies.

Launching PFS would not have been possible without the support of a group of funders who were willing to travel uncharted territory. They shared an understanding of the importance of the problems and a concern that disadvantaged men are usually an ignored and yet critical ingredient of a successful antipoverty strategy. The early PFS effort reported in these pages depended critically on support from staff at the Pew Charitable Trusts, the Ford Foundation, the AT&T Foundation, the McKnight Foundation, the Northwest Area Foundation, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and the U.S. Department of Labor.

While MDRC and the funders were ultimately interested in hard information about the effect of PFS on program participants, all agreed that a pilot phase was needed to determine the feasibility

and potential of such a program and to find out more about the noncustodial parents, a group little studied but often written off as irresponsible and beyond help.

This study reports on the lessons from the nine-site pilot, which operated from early 1992 through 1993. It addresses fundamental questions: Would the child support enforcement and job training systems – large bureaucracies with very different agendas and cultures – be able to work together and implement this complex and innovative program? Would the noncustodial parents actively participate – or even show up – in light of their hostility to a child support enforcement system most viewed as unfair and unresponsive to the realities of their own situations?

Overall, the conclusions are positive. While there were operational difficulties (including a dearth of on-the-job training positions), the programs enrolled more than 4,000 noncustodial parents. Two-thirds of them participated in program activities, with most of the others having found jobs on their own or having been referred back to the courts for further enforcement. Surprisingly, the heart of the program turned out to be the peer support sessions, with sometimes dramatic positive changes in attitudes and behavior being reported by both participants and staff. Much, too, was learned about the parents themselves. Contrary to stereotypes, for example, most of them were in regular contact with their children and recognized that they had parental responsibilities, though they tended to take a narrow view of what that entailed. Finally, local officials in the child support enforcement system, despite the challenges posed by the PFS approach, became enthusiastic advocates of its potential.

The experience of the pilot phase led MDRC to recommend that the demonstration move to a full-scale test including a rigorous random assignment research design. Positive response from pilot phase funders and critical support from an expanded funder community have made possible the second phase of the demonstration, which is beginning this spring. This phase will determine whether PFS succeeds in its bottom-line mission: increasing child support payments, reducing welfare receipt, and curtailing the growing poverty of America's children.

Judith M. Gueron
President

CONTENTS

PAGE

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS iii
PREFACE v
TABLES, FIGURES, AND BOXES ix
ABBREVIATIONS xii
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY xiii

CHAPTER

1 INTRODUCTION 1

I. Parents' Fair Share's Policy Context 2
II. The Parents' Fair Share Demonstration 8
III. Goals of the Parents' Fair Share Pilot Phase 16
IV. An Overview of This Report 22

2 THE PILOT SITES: INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURE AND PROGRAM FLOW . . 23

I. A Typical PFS Experience 23
II. The Institutional Structure of the PFS Pilot Programs 26
III. The Program Flow 38
IV. Conclusions 43

3 THE NONCUSTODIAL PARENTS 44

I. Issues Involved in an Examination of the PFS Target Group 45
II. Demographic Characteristics of the PFS Noncustodial Parents 52
III. Relationships and Attitudes 62
IV. Conclusions 77

4 PROGRAM SCALE AND PARTICIPATION PATTERNS 79

I. Program Scale 79
II. Participation Rates 82
III. Conclusions 90

5 PEER SUPPORT 91

I. The Role of Peer Support in PFS 91
II. Peer Support in the Sites 97
III. Peer Support Through the Eyes of Participants 104
IV. Conclusions 119

CHAPTER PAGE

6 ENHANCED CHILD SUPPORT ENFORCEMENT 120

I. The Role of Enhanced Child Support Enforcement in PFS 120
II. Starting Points for Enhanced Child Support Enforcement in the PFS Sites 126
III. Implementing Enhanced Child Support Enforcement in PFS 137
IV. Conclusions 147

7 THE EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING COMPONENT 149

I. Defining the Employment and Training Service Approach 150
II. Employment and Training in the Pilot Sites 159
III. The Evolution of the Employment and Training Component 180
IV. Conclusions 184

8 CONCLUSIONS AND OPEN QUESTIONS 185

I. Overall Conclusions on the Feasibility and Promise of PFS 185
II. Implications for the PFS Service Approach 187
III. Critical Questions 188
IV. Concluding Thoughts 195

APPENDICES

Appendix A Child Support Enforcement Policy and Practice 199
Appendix B Provisions of the Nine PFS Pilot States' Child Support Guidelines 210

REFERENCES 221

SELECTED MDRC PUBLICATIONS 225

TABLES, FIGURES, AND BOXES

TABLE		PAGE
1	Guidelines for Parents' Fair Share Pilot Programs: The Four Core Components	xx
2	The Parents' Fair Share Pilot Sites	xxiii
3	Selected Characteristics of Noncustodial Parents Referred to Parents' Fair Share Pilot Programs	xxviii
4	Selected Relationships and Attitudes of Noncustodial Parents Referred to Parents' Fair Share Pilot Programs	xxix
1.1	The Parents' Fair Share Pilot Sites	10
1.2	Selected Characteristics of Sites in the Parents' Fair Share Pilot Phase	11
1.3	Guidelines for Parents' Fair Share Pilot Programs: The Four Core Components	14
2.1	Parents' Fair Share Lead Agencies	31
3.1	Characteristics of Noncustodial Parents Referred to Parents' Fair Share Pilot Programs, by Site	53
3.2	Selected Characteristics of Noncustodial Parents Referred to Parents' Fair Share Pilot Programs Who Completed an Enrollment Form	61
3.3	Relationships with Children and Custodial Parents Among Noncustodial Parents Referred to Parents' Fair Share Pilot Programs Who Completed an Enrollment Form	64
3.4	Child Support Attitudes and Assistance and Work Attitudes of Noncustodial Parents Referred to Parents' Fair Share Pilot Programs Who Completed an Enrollment Form	71
4.1	Parents' Fair Share Referral and Participant Totals Through June 1993, by Site	81
4.2	Participation in PFS Activities Within Four Months of Referral Among Noncustodial Parents Referred to Parents' Fair Share	84
4.3	Participation in Selected PFS Activities Within Four Months of Referral Among Noncustodial Parents Who Participated in Parents' Fair Share	86

TABLE		PAGE
4.4	Participation Rates and Status of Nonparticipants Within Four Months of Referral Among Noncustodial Parents Referred to Parents' Fair Share	88
5.1	Session Topics in the *Responsible Fatherhood* Curriculum During the Parents' Fair Share Pilot Phase	95
5.2	Participation Levels in Peer Support Within Four Months of Referral to Parents' Fair Share Among Noncustodial Parents Who Participated in Peer Support	103
6.1	Status of Child Support Orders at Referral for Noncustodial Parents Referred to Parents' Fair Share	128
6.2	Status of Child Support Arrears at Referral for Noncustodial Parents Referred to Parents' Fair Share	129
6.3	Status of Monthly Child Support Payments Before and After Referral by Noncustodial Parents Referred to Parents' Fair Share	131
6.4	Selected Features of Child Support Enforcement in PFS Sites: PFS Innovations and Pre-Existing Practices	146
7.1	Key Providers of Employment and Training Services in the Parents' Fair Share Pilot Sites	161
7.2	Participation Rates in Selected Employment and Training Activities Within Four Months of Referral to Parents' Fair Share Among Noncustodial Parents Who Participated in Employment and Training Activities	166
7.3	Participation Levels in Employment and Training Activities Within Four Months of Referral to Parents' Fair Share Among Noncustodial Parents Who Participated in Employment and Training Activities	169
7.4	Participation Levels in Selected Employment and Training Activities Within Four Months of Referral to Parents' Fair Share Among Noncustodial Parents Who Participated in Employment and Training Activities	170
7.5	Program-Reported Employment Rates Within Four Months of Referral Among Noncustodial Parents Referred to Parents' Fair Share	173

FIGURE		
3.1	Simplified Depiction of the Parents' Fair Share Intake "Funnel"	48

BOX PAGE

Examples of PFS Organizational Structures 35

An Example of How the CSE Process Often Deals with Low-Income Noncustodial Parents 127

Examples of Two Approaches to Enhanced Child Support Enforcement During the PFS Pilot Phase 148

Employment and Training Provider Networks 164

Innovative OJT Strategies 166

ABBREVIATIONS

ABE	adult basic education
AFDC	Aid to Families with Dependent Children
BIF	Background Information Form
CSE	child support enforcement
FSA	Family Support Act (1988)
GAIN	Greater Avenues for Independence Program (California)
GED	General Educational Development certification (high school equivalency)
HHS	U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
JOBS	Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Training Program
JTPA	Job Training Partnership Act (1982)
MDRC	Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation
MIS	Management Information System
NLSY	National Longitudinal Survey of Youth
NSFH	National Survey of Families and Households
OJT	on-the-job training
PFS	Parents' Fair Share Demonstration
PIC	Private Industry Council
SDA	Service Delivery Area
SERC	Springfield Employment Resource Center
SOAP	Survey of Absent Parents
SSI	Supplemental Security Income
SWIM	Saturation Work Initiative Model (San Diego)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Parents' Fair Share Demonstration (PFS) is a multi-site test of programs that require noncustodial parents (usually fathers) of children on welfare to participate in employment-related and other services when they are unemployed and unable to meet their child support obligations. PFS is the first large-scale effort to extend to noncustodial parents the vision of mutual obligations that has guided recent welfare reform efforts. Under this "new social contract," parents – both mothers and fathers – are expected to support their own children and to take steps to become self-sufficient, and government assumes responsibility for providing employment and training services and other supports to help them do so. However, until recently, this reciprocal approach applied only to custodial parents on welfare (usually single mothers). For noncustodial parents, there was a one-way obligation: to pay child support. By creating new opportunities to match the existing obligations facing noncustodial parents, PFS seeks to increase their earnings and living standards, to translate these earnings into increased child support payments, and, ultimately, to both improve the well-being of their children and reduce public welfare spending.

This report describes the first stage of the Parents' Fair Share Demonstration: an 18- to 24-month pilot phase designed to test the operational feasibility of the PFS approach, to assess whether a full-scale evaluation of its effectiveness is warranted, and to learn more about the target population. The PFS pilot phase was supported by a consortium of private foundations (the Pew Charitable Trusts, the Ford Foundation, the AT&T Foundation, the McKnight Foundation, and the Northwest Area Foundation) and public agencies (the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the U.S. Department of Labor). It was coordinated by the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC), a nonprofit organization that develops and evaluates programs designed to build the self-sufficiency of economically disadvantaged people. An initial feasibility study was seen as critical because successful implementation of PFS demands profound institutional change and close linkages between agencies charged with collecting child support and those that provide employment and training and other services to the disadvantaged. These two kinds of agencies have fundamentally different missions and little history of collaboration.

MDRC's overall conclusion, based on data collected during more than a year of pilot operations in nine states, is positive: Although the pilot programs confronted a range of implementation issues, the PFS approach has proven to be operationally feasible and has shown sufficient promise to warrant

a rigorous test of its impacts and cost-effectiveness.[1] Thus, while continuing its efforts to strengthen the programs, MDRC recommended a full-scale evaluation, based on a random assignment research design, in a subset of the pilot states. The evaluation is beginning spring 1994.

Highlights of the Report

The first objective of the pilot phase was to appraise the operational feasibility of the PFS approach and to assess whether people and institutions appeared to behave and operate differently than they did before PFS existed. The pilot experience was positive in this regard.

Although each site confronted a range of operational problems, all were able to mount the complex program successfully. Altogether, more than 4,000 eligible noncustodial parents were identified, contacted, and referred to PFS, usually during court hearings brought on by their failure to pay child support. About two-thirds of the parents who were referred to PFS through February 1993 actually participated in a program activity within four months of the referral. This participation rate is higher than the rates measured by MDRC in mandatory employment programs for welfare recipients. Most of the parents who did not participate in PFS activities either reported employment to program staff or were referred for further enforcement action.

Equally important, there are clear signs that PFS has generated changes in both individuals and bureaucratic systems. Quantitative data show that a substantial share of the parents who were referred to PFS were actively engaged in program activities. The most dramatic signs of personal growth and change appeared during peer support groups, built around a curriculum supplied by MDRC, which emerged as the heart of many of the pilot programs.

The key institutions also changed in important ways. Most of the child support enforcement agencies began "working" cases that were typically neglected before PFS provided a constructive option for handling them. In addition to generating large numbers of referrals to PFS, this new attention "smoked out" many nonpaying noncustodial parents who had unreported income. Most of the sites also developed procedures to routinely reduce the child support obligations of noncustodial

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[1]This report has been written mostly in the past tense because it describes PFS structures and activities as they were operated during a particular point in time – the pilot phase of the demonstration. However, all of the PFS programs that were in the pilot phase are still in operation, although not all of them will be part of the next phase of the demonstration. Also, masculine pronouns are sometimes used when referring to noncustodial parents even though not all such parents are men.

parents during the period they were participating in PFS, and to raise these orders quickly if the parents failed to cooperate or found employment.

Employment and training systems were somewhat more difficult to change. A variety of institutional barriers and program design choices made it difficult for sites to build a broad menu of employment and training options for PFS participants with varying skill levels. As a result, the nature, quality, and intensity of the employment and training services participants received varied from site to site. In general, too many participants received only short-term job search assistance, and too few received classroom or on-the-job training (OJT), especially during the early months of the pilot. However, the menu of employment and training options became broader over time and the pace of OJT placement accelerated.

A second key goal of the pilot was to learn more about the PFS target population, a group that has been frequently denounced but rarely studied. A variety of quantitative and qualitative data suggest that the PFS noncustodial parents were a diverse group. However, many appeared to be living in poverty and facing critical barriers to employment. While the vast majority had at least some work experience, most reported very little recent employment, and many said they were having trouble meeting their basic needs.

In many ways, the PFS participants defied popular stereotypes of the noncustodial parents of children on welfare. For example, most of the noncustodial parents said they cared deeply about their children, saw them regularly, and thought it important to support them. However, their views of a father's role were often narrow, and it was clear that their actual payment patterns were affected not only by lack of income, but also by the state of their relationships with custodial parents and their frustration with the child support enforcement and welfare systems. Both of these factors led many noncustodial parents to draw a sharp distinction between the general concept of supporting their children and the specific requirement to pay child support through the formal system. This suggests that many of these parents would not pay formal child support regularly even if they were employed, and supports the rationale behind the peer support component, which was designed in part to build a commitment to formal child support.

The Problem: Child Poverty and the Limits of Traditional Child Support Enforcement

Recent Census Bureau data indicate that 25 percent of all children under the age of six in the United States live in poverty. Nearly 10 million children live in families receiving Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), the nation's largest cash welfare program, which primarily serves

single mothers and their children. Growing rates of poverty and welfare receipt are partly attributable to a sharp increase in the number of single-parent families, and point to the vital importance of child support as both a source of additional income for these families and a means to reduce public welfare expenditures.

During the past 20 years, concern about these issues has prompted a series of federal measures designed to improve the performance of states in collecting child support. In 1975, Congress created the federal Office of Child Support Enforcement (now housed within the Department of Health and Human Services), and required each state to establish a child support enforcement (CSE) agency to oversee efforts to establish legal paternity for children born out of wedlock (paternity establishment is a prerequisite to collecting child support for a child born to unmarried parents) and to collect child support from noncustodial parents. These services are provided to all households receiving AFDC (indeed, recipients are required to cooperate), and to non-AFDC households by request. This national CSE system was superimposed onto a highly complex and varied set of local organizational structures often involving courts, prosecuting attorneys, welfare agencies, and others.

These local structures still exist in most areas but, over time, the federal government has played an increasingly active role in regulating the CSE process. For example, the major welfare reform legislation passed in 1988 – the Family Support Act (FSA) – required states to use standard guidelines in determining how much child support noncustodial parents are required to pay, to withhold child support from the paychecks of noncustodial parents, and to improve their performance at establishing paternity for children born to unmarried parents. These steps, together with providing employment and training services and requiring participation in such services by custodial parents on welfare, have been the cornerstones of recent government efforts to ensure that parents – both mothers and fathers – are able to assume primary responsibility for supporting their own children.

Efforts to improve child support enforcement are vitally important. It has been estimated that as much as $34 billion in potential support goes unpaid each year, and almost two-thirds of single parents currently receive no child support. This suggests that both tougher enforcement and broader changes in societal attitudes are needed. However, it is important to note that these efforts are coming at a time when the economic circumstances of young men, particularly those with limited skills and education credentials, are decaying at an alarming rate. The inflation-adjusted average annual earnings of 25- to 29-year-old men without a high school diploma fell by 35 percent between 1973 and 1991. This suggests that the payoff from tighter enforcement may be constrained by the inability of some noncustodial parents to pay. Nevertheless, the "bargain" that has been offered to custodial parents on

welfare – financial support and employment and training opportunities in exchange for serious efforts to become self-sufficient – has, to date, rarely been extended to noncustodial parents. For them, the obligation has been almost entirely one-sided; they are expected to pay child support, and government promises to collect.

At the same time, it is becoming increasingly evident that the CSE system is ill-equipped to handle cases in which noncustodial parents cite unemployment as the reason for their failure to make court-ordered support payments. It is clearly counterproductive to jail a noncustodial parent who does not have the means to pay. However, in practice, judges and CSE staff have few means at their disposal to assess whether nonpaying noncustodial parents who claim to be unemployed are in fact telling the truth; available information on noncustodial parents' earnings and employment are typically several months out of date (and cover only reported earnings). With their enforcement options limited, courts are often forced to resort to stopgap measures such as setting a "purge payment" – an amount the noncustodial parent can clearly pay – and ordering him to pay this sum or go to jail. The noncustodial parent may produce the payment to gain his release, and then return to the cycle of nonpayment. In other cases, judges may order noncustodial parents to seek employment and report back to court periodically, but many courts and CSE agencies are overwhelmed and unable to carefully monitor such "seek work" orders. Given the lack of constructive alternatives for handling these cases, CSE agencies often choose not to expend resources pursuing nonpaying noncustodial parents when there is no evidence of income. Unfortunately, this means that many AFDC child support cases receive only limited attention.

This problem is exacerbated by the low levels of cooperation offered by both custodial and noncustodial parents, especially in AFDC cases, where the state retains, as reimbursement for welfare costs, all but the first $50 in child support paid each month. A variety of factors may help explain this resistance: a preference (on the part of both parents) for informal, direct payments that bypass the system; conflicts between the parents; or simple unwillingness on the part of some fathers to accept responsibility. In addition, many noncustodial parents are convinced that the CSE system is fundamentally unfair, particularly to low-income noncustodial parents who, in their view, are frequently presented with support obligations that far exceed their ability to pay. Without cooperation, it is extremely difficult for the CSE system to locate these individuals to establish paternity for children born out of wedlock or enforce support orders; many of the noncustodial parents of children who are receiving AFDC live on the fringes of the mainstream economy, beyond the reach of the administrative records available to CSE staff. Ironically, an unintended result of tougher child support enforcement

may be to push a group of low-earning, sporadically working men further into the underground economy, diminishing the chances that they will provide financial stability for their families or boost them out of poverty.

This constellation of factors – low earnings by noncustodial parents, limited enforcement options, and lack of cooperation by parents – helps explain why only 16 percent of AFDC custodial parents received formal child support payments in 1992.

The Parents' Fair Share Response

Frustrated by the situation described above, in the 1980s judges and CSE staff in a few jurisdictions began to experiment with procedures that allowed courts to order unemployed noncustodial parents to participate in employment and training programs. This approach could provide assistance to those in need while simultaneously "smoking out" those who were working off the books: Faced with a requirement to participate in a program that would disrupt their work schedules, some parents admitted that they were employed and agreed to pay child support. Moreover, the new approach, based on mutual rather than one-sided obligations, held the potential to increase the level of voluntary cooperation by noncustodial parents, making it easier for CSE agencies to keep track of their whereabouts.

Authority to test this basic approach was built into the Family Support Act. FSA was concerned primarily with tougher child support enforcement and employment services and requirements for custodial parents on welfare; the Act created the Job Opportunities and Basic Skills (JOBS) Training Program for welfare recipients. However, it also included a provision instructing the Secretary of Health and Human Services to permit a group of states to test the provision of JOBS services to noncustodial parents of children on welfare who are unemployed and unable to meet their child support obligations.

Around the time FSA passed, several private foundations were focusing increasing attention on child poverty, the rising number of single-parent families, low child support payment rates, and the relationship of these developments to declining earnings among men. In late 1989, MDRC initiated discussions with foundation and federal officials about building a demonstration and research project around the FSA provision described above.

Throughout 1990 and early 1991, MDRC conducted background research to identify a set of program services that seemed likely to engage and assist unemployed noncustodial parents. Three key conclusions emerged from this effort. First, although the PFS population was likely to be diverse, it

was assumed that at least some participants would need fairly intensive training or education in order to secure stable employment. However, it also seemed clear that these parents would need jobs and income quickly because most would not be welfare recipients (AFDC is only available to custodial parents) and would be facing large child support debts. Second, employment and training services alone would probably not suffice to engage noncustodial parents and make a lasting difference in their employment and payment patterns; the program would also need to address broader social and psychological factors that lead many noncustodial parents to resist working and paying support regularly. Third, the intervention would be unlikely to achieve its long-term goal – assisting children – if the CSE system practiced "business as usual." Changes would be needed to ensure that the noncustodial parents' child support obligations matched their ability to pay, both during and after their participation in PFS, and that CSE agencies could move quickly to translate their earnings into support payments and to respond when noncustodial parents failed to participate in PFS as ordered.

As a result of this research, states applying for admission to PFS were required to build programs around four core components: a menu of employment and training services with a special emphasis on on-the-job training (OJT) as a means to mix training with income-producing work;[2] peer support groups built around a curriculum stressing responsible fatherhood; enhanced CSE activities; and opportunities for noncustodial parents to mediate conflicts with custodial parents. These components are described further in Table 1. Sites were also encouraged to devise strategies to use PFS to reach out to fathers of AFDC children who had not yet established paternity for children born out of wedlock in addition to working with parents who had already been ordered to pay support but were failing to do so (most of the pre-PFS programs described earlier targeted parents with support orders).

Apart from there being a general requirement to include the four core components and to build relatively large-scale programs, states were free to design PFS programs to fit their own objectives and views of the target population. This flexible approach partly reflected the limited knowledge base about effective employment and training strategies for disadvantaged men. It also seemed appropriate because PFS targeted a broad, varied population and would operate in diverse environments. In contrast to earlier MDRC demonstration projects that were created to test a specific set of services designed for a fairly narrow target population, PFS tested a new, large-scale bureaucratic *system* that

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[2]Under an OJT arrangement, an employer receives a publicly funded subsidy in return for hiring and training a disadvantaged worker.

TABLE 1

GUIDELINES FOR PARENTS' FAIR SHARE PILOT PROGRAMS: THE FOUR CORE COMPONENTS

EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING

The centerpiece of Parents' Fair Share pilot programs was a group of activities intended to help participants secure long-term, stable employment at a wage level that would allow them to support themselves and their children. Since noncustodial parents vary in their employability levels, pilot programs were strongly encouraged to offer a variety of services, including job search assistance and opportunities for education and skills training. In addition, since it was important to engage participants in income-producing activities quickly and to establish the practice of paying child support, pilot programs were required to offer opportunities for on-the-job training (OJT), which combines skill-building and immediate income.

ENHANCED CHILD SUPPORT ENFORCEMENT

A primary objective of Parents' Fair Share is to increase support payments made on behalf of children living in single-parent welfare households. This goal will not be met unless increases in participants' earnings are translated into regular child support payments. Although a legal and administrative structure already exists to establish and enforce child support obligations, pilot programs were encouraged to develop new procedures, services, and incentives in this area. These included steps to expedite the establishment of paternity and child support awards and wage withholding arrangements, and quick follow-up when noncustodial parents failed to participate in PFS as ordered, plus flexible rules that allowed child support orders to be temporarily reduced while noncustodial parents participated in Parents' Fair Share.

PEER SUPPORT

MDRC's preliminary research suggested that employment and training services, by themselves, might not lead to changed attitudes and regular child support payments for all participants. Thus, pilot programs were expected to provide regular support groups for participants. The purpose of this component was to inform participants about their rights and obligations as noncustodial parents, to encourage positive parental behavior and sexual responsibility, to strengthen participants' commitment to work, and to enhance participants' life skills. The component was built around a curriculum called *Responsible Fatherhood*, which was supplied by MDRC. Some of the pilot programs also included guest speakers, recreational activities, mentoring programs, or planned parent-child activities.

MEDIATION

Often disagreements between custodial and noncustodial parents about visitation, household expenditures, lifestyles, child care, and school arrangements – and the roles and actions of other adults in their children's lives – influence child support payment patterns. Thus, pilot programs were required to provide opportunities for parents to mediate their differences using services modeled on those provided through many family courts in divorce cases.

attempted to incorporate noncustodial parents into the JOBS program and redefine child support enforcement to include both obligations and opportunities.

The Institutional Challenge

PFS presented daunting institutional and operational challenges. The two main organizational players – employment and training providers and CSE agencies – had little history of collaboration and few incentives to expend resources on the PFS target population. Moreover, their missions and organizational cultures were fundamentally different. PFS asked these systems to reconcile their divergent perspectives, make major changes in their standard operating procedures, and focus their efforts on a long-neglected group.

The greatest changes were demanded of CSE agencies. Since the national CSE program was created, a mix of financial and organizational factors has pushed the system to focus on maximizing immediate support collections. CSE agencies are generally unfamiliar with the notion of making short-term service investments in noncustodial parents in the hope of increasing their ability to pay later. In fact, as noted earlier, these agencies are likely to de-emphasize cases that seem unlikely to yield immediate payoffs. Moreover, many CSE agencies see themselves as representing the custodial parent or the state in an adversarial process and strongly resist measures that they perceive as "coddling" noncustodial parents. PFS pushed the system not only to identify and take action on these cases, but also to invest in the noncustodial parents by temporarily reducing their child support obligations during the period of PFS participation.

Employment and training providers are, in principle, much more familiar with investing in the human capital of participants. However, the key systems that provide employment and training to the disadvantaged, the JOBS program and the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) system, have had limited experience working with very disadvantaged men. JOBS programs primarily serve female welfare recipients, and the voluntary JTPA system, driven for years by performance standards stressing low costs and high placement rates, has been criticized for underserving individuals facing severe barriers to employment and for emphasizing short-term services. PFS asked both of these systems to alter their approaches.

Fortunately, the key changes sought by PFS were generally consistent with recent federal efforts to reorient both systems. For example, the Family Support Act and subsequent regulations require CSE agencies to take action on all cases within prescribed time limits and to ensure that child support obligations reflect parents' changing economic circumstances. Similarly, 1992 amendments to the Job

Training Partnership Act pushed that system to serve more disadvantaged clients with longer-term services; and FSA's JOBS provisions were created partly to reorient state welfare-to-work efforts to stress education and training in addition to short-term job search assistance. However, as with any attempt to change large, decentralized systems, these federal efforts have only gradually begun to affect local practices and organizational cultures. Thus, in many respects, PFS was still cutting against the grain.

These challenging circumstances and the lack of previous knowledge about the PFS target group pushed the PFS demonstration partners toward a two-phase strategy. Under this plan, the demonstration began with an 18- to 24-month pilot phase designed to test the feasibility of the PFS model, to learn more about the noncustodial parents, and to assess whether the PFS approach appeared to be promising. If the pilot phase experience was sufficiently encouraging, MDRC would work with the pilot phase partners and other interested parties to develop a rigorous evaluation of the effectiveness of PFS based on a random assignment research design.

In late 1991, nine states were selected from among 15 that applied to join the PFS pilot phase. Each participating state was granted permission to use JOBS funds to serve noncustodial parents and received a grant from the PFS foundation partners. States were also required to contribute their own (or local) resources, and both state or local funding and foundation grants could be used to draw down federal matching funds. Table 2 shows that each of the participating states operated PFS in either one or two counties rather than statewide. The nine pilot programs (referred to here as "sites") began operating between March and August 1992.

Achievements of the Pilot Phase

MDRC's decision to recommend a full-scale test of the impacts of PFS was based on three broad conclusions, drawn after more than a year of close observation and the collection and analysis of considerable data on the operational performance of the pilot sites. These three key findings are as follows:

- **The pilot sites were able to recruit diverse institutional partners, build programs around the four core PFS components, and ensure that participants received a consistent message about the goals of PFS.**

Given the challenging circumstances described in the previous section, the ability of sites to mount PFS programs including the four core components was far from certain. First, it was necessary to assemble a network of diverse agencies to operate the program. Second, sites needed to devise

TABLE 2

THE PARENTS' FAIR SHARE PILOT SITES

State	Location of PFS Program	Name of PFS Program
Alabama	Mobile County (Mobile)	Mobile County Parents' Fair Share Program
Florida	Duval County (Jacksonville)	Duval County Parents' Fair Share Project
Massachusetts	Hampden County (Springfield)	MassJOBS Parents' Fair Share Project
Michigan	Kent County (Grand Rapids)	Kent County Parents' Fair Share Project
Minnesota	Anoka and Dakota counties (suburban Minneapolis-St. Paul)	Minnesota Parents' Fair Share Program
Missouri	Jackson County (Kansas City)	FUTURES Connection
New Jersey	Mercer County (Trenton)	Operation Fatherhood
Ohio	Montgomery (Dayton) and Butler counties	Options for Parental Training and Support (OPTS)
Tennessee	Shelby County (Memphis)	Tennessee Parents' Fair Share Project

creative management strategies to blend these disparate pieces into coherent programs reflecting the multiple goals of PFS.

All of the sites achieved the first objective. They succeeded in building multi-agency partnerships to run the program and, by the fall of 1992, PFS projects incorporating the four core components were up and running in all sites. The networks included JOBS programs, JTPA agencies, CSE agencies, courts, private nonprofit organizations, school districts, and community colleges, among others.

As expected, smooth linkages among these partners took time to develop. However, over the course of the pilot, sites developed numerous strategies to reconcile divergent organizational cultures and ensure that participants did not receive mixed messages about the program's goals. For example, in most sites, staff from various agencies were outstationed in the offices of others or in a central PFS program office, and often led activities together. In addition, all sites developed management teams, representing the key agencies, that met periodically to identify and jointly resolve operational issues. As a result of these efforts, the programs received consistent attention from staff in most of the key agencies and broad community and political support.

The major challenge, discussed further below, has been to develop a broad menu of employment and training options for PFS participants. While all sites developed some strong services, the range of options was typically too narrow to accommodate a diverse target population, especially during the early months of the pilot.

- **Nearly all of the sites have developed effective procedures to identify eligible noncustodial parents, move them into program services, and encourage and enforce regular participation.**

The first concrete task facing the local PFS partners – and the first test of their ability to collaborate – was to design and implement systems to ensure a smooth flow of people through the PFS program. Specifically, an early challenge was to develop procedures to routinely identify large numbers of noncustodial parents with children on AFDC who were not making court-ordered support payments; bring them to a court hearing or an appointment with CSE staff to explain their nonpayment; and, if unemployment was cited, require them to participate in PFS and refer them for program services (for reasons discussed below, most sites did not make major efforts to recruit fathers who had not yet established paternity). This task involved intense inter-agency collaboration and entirely new procedures because, as noted earlier, most CSE agencies had not consistently pursued these cases in the past. The ability of sites to mount large-scale programs was a key test of the

operational feasibility of PFS and would be critical to conducting the rigorous evaluation of PFS's effects that is central to Phase II of the demonstration.

Although the pace of referrals was slow at first in most sites, by mid-October 1993, the sites had succeeded in contacting and referring more than 4,000 noncustodial parents for PFS services. This required identifying a much larger number of nonpaying noncustodial parents because, as expected, many either failed to show up for scheduled hearings or appointments or admitted that they were employed and agreed to pay support without being referred to PFS. In order to facilitate a steady flow of referrals, CSE agencies developed new internal procedures to identify cases and worked with courts to establish special PFS dockets to process large numbers of potential cases.

Noncustodial parents who were referred to PFS were typically instructed to appear at an orientation session at the program office within a few days; at orientation, they were scheduled for a peer support group and, shortly thereafter, employment and training activities. About two-thirds of the noncustodial parents who were referred to PFS actually participated in an employment and training or peer support activity within four months of the referral. Given the fact that less than 5 percent of the noncustodial parents were engaged in employment and training activities on their own at the time of the referral, this suggests a major increase in service receipt levels. Moreover, the PFS participation rate was higher than comparable rates measured by MDRC in mandatory employment programs for AFDC recipients that also imposed participation requirements on large numbers of individuals. Finally, most of the noncustodial parents who were referred to PFS but did not participate in program services either reported to program staff that they were employed or were referred to CSE staff for further enforcement action. Relatively few noncustodial parents "slipped through the cracks."

- **There have been clear signs that PFS is changing both individuals and bureaucratic systems.**

The pilot phase was not designed to assess whether PFS is *effective*; that is, whether the program is making a difference. Without a benchmark against which to compare pilot phase activities and outcomes (for example, a comparison or control group of noncustodial parents who did not have access to PFS), it is impossible to determine whether these would have occurred even if PFS did not exist. Nevertheless, an important goal of the pilot phase was to assess whether participants and institutions appeared to behave and operate differently than they did before PFS began. If no such change was evident, it would be difficult to argue that PFS had the potential to make a difference.

Regarding the participants, the quantitative data show that a substantial share of those referred to PFS were actively engaged in program activities (participants were usually expected to attend at

least three days a week). Noncustodial parents who participated in PFS attended an average of 26 activity sessions, including peer support and employment and training activities, within four months of the referral to PFS (the definition of a "session" varied depending on the activity). Almost one-fourth of these participants attended 40 or more sessions, and nearly half were still active in the final month covered by the data, which suggests that the average number of sessions per person would be considerably higher if additional months of follow-up information were available. More than 20 percent of those referred to PFS reported employment to program staff within four months, another figure that will increase with longer follow-up.

The most dramatic signs of change appeared during the peer support sessions, which emerged as the heart of most of the PFS programs. Many participants quickly developed a strong attachment to this activity, and both group members and staff insisted that profound attitudinal changes resulted. Participants frequently reported rediscovering their strong feelings for their children, which inspired them to work harder to obtain employment, pay child support regularly, and choose "above ground," mainstream activities over underground opportunities. A few sites designed expansive peer support components including a range of extracurricular activities for participants. In one site, a group of peer support participants, energized by their experience in this component, created an independent organization to advocate for the interests of noncustodial parents.

Less dramatic but equally important change occurred in the key institutions involved in PFS. CSE agencies began "working" cases that were typically neglected before PFS provided a constructive enforcement option. In addition to generating large numbers of referrals to PFS, this new focus uncovered a substantial amount of previously unreported income. One site found that at least 14 percent of the nonpaying noncustodial parents identified as potentially eligible for PFS quickly acknowledged that they were employed, agreed to pay child support, and were never referred to the program; other parents "found" (or acknowledged) employment just after the referral but before receiving any program services.

Four of the nine sites developed procedures to routinely reduce the child support obligations of noncustodial parents during the period they were participating in PFS, and to raise these orders quickly if a parent failed to cooperate or found employment. This represented a major change because support orders were rarely changed in this manner in the past. Finally, CSE agencies developed new systems to expedite the implementation of wage withholding orders for participants who found employment and to follow up quickly when noncustodial parents failed to participate in PFS as ordered. These individuals were referred for further enforcement action including, in some cases, contempt hearings.

In most sites, these enhanced CSE efforts were facilitated by designating specific CSE staff to work with PFS cases.

Employment and training systems were more difficult to change, perhaps because these agencies perceived that they were already prepared to serve the PFS population. Although some JOBS programs took steps to tailor their approaches for PFS, many JTPA-funded agencies were reluctant to take risks on PFS participants. Thus, especially during the early months of the pilot, too many participants received only relatively short-term job search assistance and relatively few received classroom or on-the-job training (OJT). Nevertheless, several sites identified strong nonprofit employment and training providers with experience serving individuals facing serious barriers to employment, and, as discussed below, the menu of employment and training options became broader and the pace of OJT placements accelerated over time.

Lessons and Challenges

In addition to confirming the operational feasibility of the PFS approach, the pilot phase research effort uncovered a wealth of useful information about the PFS target population and about operating PFS programs. This section discusses the key findings and conclusions reached during the pilot.

The Noncustodial Parents

Much less is known about the fathers of children who receive welfare than about their mothers. This is in part because custodial parents are, by definition, part of a mainstream social services delivery system, while noncustodial parents may not be part of such a system and may not work steadily in the mainstream economy. This makes it difficult to study this group using traditional data sources such as surveys and administrative records maintained by government agencies. Thus, while the PFS pilot sites worked primarily with a subset of AFDC noncustodial parents – those with child support orders in place – the project has provided an unusual opportunity to study and learn about this group. Data on the backgrounds, living conditions, and attitudes of noncustodial parents were collected via standard forms completed during intake interviews. Later, MDRC researchers interviewed program staff and a small but diverse group of participants to supplement the baseline data. Key findings include the following (some, but not all, of the figures cited below are included in Tables 3 and 4):

TABLE 3

SELECTED CHARACTERISTICS OF NONCUSTODIAL PARENTS REFERRED TO PARENTS' FAIR SHARE PILOT PROGRAMS

Characteristic	Percent
Gender	
Men	97
Women	3
Age	
Under 22	14
22-25	23
26-29	20
30 and over	43
Marital status	
Never married	59
Married, living with spouse	9
Separated or divorced	30
Number of children	
1	33
2	29
3	19
4 or more	19
Number of partners with whom noncustodial parent had children	
1	56
2	30
3 or more	12
Lived with father at age 14	48
Months of full-time work in last 12 months	
0	49
1-3	16
4-6	16
7-9	10
10-12	8
Highest diploma or degree achieved	
GED	12
High school diploma	39
Associate's or 4-year degree	3
None	46

NOTE: Data reported by the 2,404 noncustodial parents who were referred to Parents' Fair Share through February 28, 1993.

Some distributions do not sum to 100 percent because of rounding or missing items.

TABLE 4

SELECTED RELATIONSHIPS AND ATTITUDES OF NONCUSTODIAL PARENTS REFERRED TO PARENTS' FAIR SHARE PILOT PROGRAMS

Relationship or Attitude	Percent
Relationship of parents at target child's conception (a)	
Married, living together	15
Married, living apart	3
Unmarried, living together	28
Unmarried, living apart	51
Steady relationship	33
No steady relationship	18
Frequency of contact with target child in last 12 months (a)	
None	7
About once	4
Several times	12
One to three times a month	18
About once a week	13
Several times a week	41
Influence over major decisions in target child's life in last 12 months (a)	
None	43
Some	30
A great deal	25
Perceptions about whether various factors are good reasons for not paying child support (percent saying that the reason is a good one)	
Noncustodial parent is unemployed	85
Child support order is too high	47
Noncustodial parent has another family to support	27
There are disagreements about visitation	35
There are disagreements about how the money is spent	44
Other parent does not need the money	15
Other parent has another partner	11
Noncustodial parent does not accept responsibility for the children	12

NOTES: Data reported by the 2,205 noncustodial parents who were referred to Parents' Fair Share by February 28, 1993, and completed the PFS Enrollment Form.

Some distributions do not sum to 100 percent because of rounding or missing items.

(a) "Target child" refers to the youngest child for whom the noncustodial parent reported being behind on support payments.

- **The PFS noncustodial parents are a diverse group; however, many appear to be living in poverty and facing critical barriers to employment.**

The vast majority of the noncustodial parents who were referred to PFS during the pilot phase are men. Almost half were 30 years old or older, but more than one-third were 25 years old or younger. Nearly 60 percent had never been married. Overall, the population was about two-thirds African-American, one-third white, and 6 percent Hispanic, although this breakdown varied substantially by site.[3]

Most of the noncustodial parents reported very little recent employment (although, once again, there was variation from site to site). Nearly two-thirds of the parents said they had worked three months or less in the past year, and one in seven said they had been unemployed for more than two years. Almost three-fourths reported that their most recent hourly wage was less than $7 an hour. Moreover, many of the parents faced important barriers to success in the labor market. For example, while just over half had earned a high school diploma or General Educational Development (GED) certificate, sites that routinely administered diagnostic tests found that many participants scored far below their reported grade level. Three-fourths of the enrollees reported that they had been arrested at least once since their sixteenth birthday; nearly half said they had been convicted.

On the other hand, there was a group of noncustodial parents with somewhat more extensive work histories. About one-third said they were either employed at the point they were referred to PFS (the programs may serve individuals who are underemployed) or had been out of work less than three months; about one-fourth said that their current or most recent job had lasted at least one year; and one-fourth said that their current or most recent job paid $7 or more an hour. Moreover, in assessing the data on employment histories, it is critical to note that, in most sites, noncustodial parents had a strong incentive to underreport their recent work experience at the point these data were collected, since most had been called in to court to explain why they had not been paying child support.

Still, many of the noncustodial parents said they were having trouble meeting their basic needs. When asked, in interviews, how they supported themselves, many described cobbling together income from a variety of sources including "odd jobs" performed for cash, part-time jobs, Unemployment Insurance payments, and welfare payments (paid to the noncustodial parents directly or, more commonly, to the women with whom they frequently stayed). Many faced staggering debts owing to

[3]It is not clear whether this group is typical of noncustodial parents nationwide because the PFS sites were not chosen on the basis of their representativeness, but rather on the basis of applications submitted by states.

fines, medical bills, and child support arrearages (which averaged more than $4,000 per person at the point of referral to PFS). Nearly 40 percent said there had been a time during the past three months when they needed food but could not afford to get it, and nearly one-third said they had been unable to pay the rent at some point during that period. Despite their ages, less than 5 percent of the noncustodial parents reported that they were living alone when they entered PFS. Many had no stable address or lived in complex households including a wide variety of extended family members spanning several generations.

These data appear to confirm the basic premise behind PFS – that lack of income presents a serious obstacle to payment of child support for many noncustodial parents of children who receive AFDC. Moreover, the program appears to provide a rare opportunity to engage a group of men who are only marginally connected to the economic and social mainstream.

- **Most of the noncustodial parents who participated in PFS said they cared deeply about their children and thought it important to support them. However, their views of a father's role were often narrow, and many strongly resisted paying child support through the formal system.**

Most of the noncustodial parents referred to PFS during the pilot phase (62 percent) reported having either one or two children at the point of referral, and the majority reported having had children with only one partner. In addition, most reported having had regular contact with the youngest child for whom the parent reported being behind on support payments (referred to as the "target child" in the research). More than half said they had seen the child at least once a week, and only about 7 percent said they had not seen the child at all in the past year. More than half said they played at least some role in key childrearing decisions. Although the usual caveats about self-reported information must be kept in mind, these data – like those gathered in some other studies of this population – do not support the popular stereotype of this population as men who have fathered large numbers of children with multiple partners and then abandoned them.

On the other hand, program staff reported that, while most of the noncustodial parents had strong feelings for their children, many did not fully appreciate or understand a father's role. For example, staff noted that many fathers defined their role in purely financial terms. Similarly, some peer support facilitators reported that, while most of the parents in their groups saw their children frequently, the time they spent together was often not "productive." Staff attributed these attitudes and behavior patterns in part to a lack of positive male parental role models; less than half of those referred to PFS said they had lived with their own fathers at age 14.

Moreover, while most of the PFS enrollees said they did not accept the validity of a set of commonly cited reasons for not paying child support, it is clear that their actual payment patterns were affected not only by lack of income, but also by their relationships with custodial parents and their frustration with the CSE and welfare systems. Both factors led many noncustodial parents to draw a sharp distinction between supporting their children, on the one hand, and paying child support through the formal system, on the other.

Most PFS participants were united in their hostility to the CSE system. Two of the most common complaints were that the system favors women (custodial parents) and that it does not adequately consider the circumstances of low-income noncustodial parents; some PFS participants also believed that the system is racist. Many noncustodial parents said they accumulated substantial child support debts during periods when they were unemployed and either did not know or did not believe they could obtain a modification of their support obligation. Data collected for the pilot phase confirm that many of the noncustodial parents' child support obligations appeared to exceed their ability to pay. Similarly, although only about 13 percent of enrollees described their relationship with their youngest child's other parent as "somewhat hostile" or "extremely hostile" overall, many reported conflicts over specific issues that cut across socioeconomic groups such as visitation, childrearing, and the role of the custodial parent's new partner in the child's life.

Some PFS noncustodial parents reacted to these issues by refusing to pay support at all. Others were willing to pay, at least sporadically, but only in the form of gifts or direct purchases for their children; they strongly resisted paying either the custodial parent or the state. Indeed, more than half of the parents entering PFS reported that they had bought gifts or necessities for their children or had given money directly to the custodial parent in the three months preceding the referral to PFS, but less than one-fourth said they had paid support to a court or government agency during this period. These in-kind (nonmonetary) or direct contributions are not counted by the CSE system, but many noncustodial parents prefer them nonetheless because they feel certain their support has reached the child.

These factors suggest that many of these parents would not pay formal child support regularly even if they were employed, and support the rationale behind the peer support component, which is designed in part to build a commitment to formal child support. Indeed, one of the most challenging objectives of this activity is to persuade noncustodial parents that they can do their child the most good by paying through the system, thereby staying out of legal trouble, even though these payments are mostly retained by the state.

Lessons About Operating PFS

The overall positive conclusions about operational feasibility described earlier do not imply that the pilot phase was problem-free. Each site confronted a variety of operational challenges, and all continue to display both strengths and weaknesses. Throughout the pilot, MDRC closely monitored the sites to help identify operational issues and assess technical assistance needs. This effort suggested a number of important lessons about operating PFS programs, which have been incorporated into MDRC's technical assistance and may be reflected in the PFS approach during Phase II of the demonstration. These include the following:

- **A wide variety of organizational approaches was tested during the pilot phase; no one strategy emerged as superior.**

Each site developed a unique strategy for addressing the organizational and management challenges presented by PFS. These approaches were influenced by the nature of pre-existing organizational resources and linkages in the PFS communities, the source of the impetus for PFS, and the vision of PFS held by key managers and staff.

Each pilot program was coordinated by a lead agency. About half the programs were led by JOBS agencies; in others, the lead agencies were nonprofit organizations or, in one case, a CSE agency. The lead agencies typically provided some services directly and contracted with outside agencies for others. In some sites, responsibility for key services was consolidated with a few agencies, while in others it was dispersed among many.

The pilot phase experience indicated that no one organizational structure is clearly preferable. The key challenge for all sites was to develop systems to manage the complex multi-agency partnerships and to build a distinct "PFS culture" that incorporated key aspects of each of the partner agencies' perspectives. This process did not always go smoothly, and tensions emerged in all sites. The key factor that affected sites' ability to identify, define, and solve problems was the level of active involvement by senior staff from the partner agencies.

- **The peer support component emerged as the glue that holds PFS together for participants, maintaining their interest and involvement. However, ongoing support is needed to sustain whatever benefits this activity generates.**

Many noncustodial parents were extremely angry and frustrated when they entered PFS, seeing the program as an extension of a CSE system that they perceived to be fundamentally unfair. Many were in the midst of painful separations or disputes with the custodial parents of their children. Sites

quickly learned that the peer support component, which was designed to engage the noncustodial parents around their interest in their children, while allowing them to air grievances in a supportive environment, was able to quickly soften participants' hostility and give the PFS program credibility. Moreover, the apparent attitudinal changes stimulated by peer support helped to create the preconditions for success in the employment and training component. Thus, sites usually placed peer support first in the sequence of program activities. In some sites, participants completed the full peer support curriculum before moving on to employment and training activities. In others, they began peer support first and later participated in both components concurrently.

Although peer support appears to have exerted a strong influence on noncustodial parents' outlooks, it is too early to tell whether this will translate into lasting changes in behavior. Staff and participants reported that many parents live in environments that do not support the new, more positive outlooks they developed in the program. Thus, it is crucial that participants have opportunities to remain involved with PFS, and that they succeed in obtaining jobs that can help them deliver on their commitment to their children. Short of this, the changes seen in peer support may not last.

- **The most difficult challenge facing sites was to develop a broad menu of employment and training options for PFS participants.**

In designing the PFS employment and training component, MDRC encouraged sites to develop a range of employment and training options for a diverse population. Particular emphasis was placed on-the-job training (OJT), which was seen as an ideal vehicle to combine training with income-producing work. Recent results from the National JTPA Study showed that OJT can produce statistically significant increases in earnings for men judged appropriate for this service.

The decision to encourage substantial use of OJT was made despite two potential obstacles. First, JTPA agencies were the logical choice to assume responsibility for this service. However, as noted earlier, this system has been criticized for not taking risks on disadvantaged clients. Second, JTPA rules governing OJT have been tightened to ensure that employers provide real training in exchange for the subsidy they receive; these reforms were prompted by earlier investigations, which revealed that many OJT placements involved little documented training. Many local JTPA agencies contend that the new rules make the OJT package less attractive to employers, and have responded by de-emphasizing the service.

During the early months of the pilot, almost all sites had difficulty placing PFS participants in OJT positions or other JTPA-funded training. Most sites chose to focus instead on relatively short-term job search or job-readiness training; two sites focused heavily on basic (that is, remedial)

education. Overall, more than three-fourths of all employment and training participants attended job-readiness or job search activities, and about one-third attended basic education; fewer than one in five received skills training or OJT. Thus, while each site developed some strong services early in the pilot, all had trouble utilizing OJT, and few were successful in creating the broad menu of employment and training services that was envisioned by MDRC.

There were several problems with the early, narrow employment and training strategies. On the one hand, it is clear that job-readiness and job search services were both necessary and sufficient for some participants, and some of the sites that stressed these activities achieved relatively high job placement rates. However, there was concern that this approach was not appropriate for many participants and that, without the benefit of skill-building activities, many of those who were placed were finding the same types of jobs they would have obtained on their own (in other words, that PFS may not have made a difference for these individuals). This is suggested by the average wage rate for participants who reported employment within four months of referral: just over $6 an hour.

On the other hand, the sites that stressed basic education were seeking to build human capital. However, there was doubt about whether participants would remain active in these classes for long periods in the absence of income and whether they would ever graduate to jobs. Again, this argued for opportunities to mix training with income-producing work.

During the course of the pilot, MDRC's technical assistance focused on helping sites broaden their employment and training service offerings. Consultants provided training on OJT marketing (that is, persuading employers to hire and train PFS participants in exchange for a wage subsidy) and running effective job search assistance activities. The U.S. Department of Labor, a PFS partner, challenged the local JTPA agencies to take a more active role in PFS, and offered assistance in doing so. Finally, sites were asked to develop opportunities for part-time work for participants in classroom training or education and post-placement follow-up services to help increase job retention, particularly for individuals placed through job search activities.

These recommendations stimulated important changes in nearly all sites. Several sites restructured the employment and training provider network or the sequence of activities to focus more heavily on skill-building activities. At the same time, better training and newly hired job developers dramatically accelerated the pace of OJT placement; by October 1993, more than 300 PFS participants had been placed into OJT positions (one site had made more than 60 OJT placements). Thus, it seems clear that the general employment and training approach sought by MDRC is feasible, albeit difficult and time-consuming to implement.

- **While there is a range of obstacles to developing a flexible and responsive CSE system, CSE agencies emerged as strong supporters of PFS.**

Administrative, legal, and philosophical obstacles confronted the effort to develop a more responsive CSE system for PFS participants. For example, some CSE agencies, on principle, opposed the idea of temporarily reducing child support obligations during the period of program participation, while others contended that state law prohibited them from doing so. Similarly, while most sites agreed that the PFS participation requirement should be vigorously enforced, overwhelmed courts and CSE staff could not always oblige. In the end, however, most sites were able to make important changes. Four of the nine implemented some kind of routine reduction or suspension of child support obligations for PFS participants, and most tried to respond quickly when participants were not attending program activities. An important policy question is whether these enhancements could be sustained or replicated in CSE systems facing increasing pressure to improve their collection performance; in many sites, they required special case-by-case procedures that might be costly to institute on a large scale.

- **The vast majority of noncustodial parents referred to PFS had support orders in place; few sites made intensive efforts to work with parents who had not yet established paternity or a support order.**

Most of the noncustodial parents of children receiving AFDC do not have child support orders. One study found that only about one-fourth of never-married mothers receiving AFDC had paternity established for at least one of their children; paternity establishment is a prerequisite for obtaining a support order when a child is born to unmarried parents. Nevertheless, most of the small-scale pre-PFS programs linking child support enforcement with employment and training focused on noncustodial parents with support orders in place. This is not surprising because these programs were often initiated by courts or agencies that were frustrated by the lack of enforcement alternatives for these cases. Moreover, parents who have not established paternity or obtained a support order are, by definition, difficult to identify and locate.

MDRC anticipated that most of the PFS states would adopt this same approach. However, as noted earlier, prior to the start of the project, participating states were also urged to use PFS as a means to reach out to noncustodial parents who had not established paternity. Under this "early intervention" approach, PFS services would be provided to these putative fathers as part of an effort to encourage them to establish paternity voluntarily.

In fact, as described earlier, most of the sites were consumed with the challenging task of

developing procedures to routinely identify and refer noncustodial parents with support orders. Thus, while most of these states are testing new paternity establishment strategies to comply with new federal performance standards, PFS was usually not part of these efforts (although PFS may be an option once paternity is established through hospital-based or other community outreach efforts).

However, one site did initiate promising efforts in two areas. First, some noncustodial parents were recruited into PFS through community-based outreach efforts; some of these fathers had not established paternity for children on AFDC and agreed to do so. Second, the PFS lead agency, an established community-based organization, worked with the CSE agency to reach out to putative fathers who had been named by custodial parents during AFDC intake interviews (welfare applicants are required to name the noncustodial parents of their children). Rather than undertake its usual location efforts, which often prove to be fruitless, the CSE agency routinely turned these names over to the PFS agency, which went out into the community to find these men and recruit them into PFS. Early evidence suggests that these special measures may have helped to improve the site's paternity establishment performance.

- **Few PFS participants obtained mediation services; this is consistent with the results of previous studies.**

Mediation was included as a PFS component primarily as a "safety valve." In its background research, MDRC found that disputes between custodial and noncustodial parents over visitation, custody, childrearing, and other issues, though legally separate from child support, nevertheless affected support payment patterns. Moreover, it was assumed that the peer support component, if successful, would lead many noncustodial parents to seek increased contact with their children which, in turn, might trigger additional conflicts.

The profile of the noncustodial parents described above confirms that conflicts often affected payment levels. However, the pilot sites found that relatively few noncustodial parents expressed interest in mediation and, when they did, it was difficult to persuade custodial parents to participate. Some have speculated that mediation is unfamiliar to these parents and that they may doubt its impartiality. This may explain why a few sites appear to have had some success with more informal mediation efforts assisted by program staff. In any case, low utilization rates – particularly among low-income parents – have been found in other studies of mediation initiatives.

Looking Ahead to Phase II

During the early months of the pilot phase, there was wide variation across the sites in almost all aspects of PFS, from intake approaches to service strategies. However, during the course of the pilot, as lessons about useful operational strategies emerged and were disseminated by MDRC, the level of variation began to decrease.

The service approach for Phase II should reflect this growing consensus. Although much flexibility should remain, the approach may be specified in somewhat more detail based on the pilot experience. For example, during Phase II, each site could be asked to develop three types of employment and training services:

- Structured job-readiness and job search activities.
- Opportunities for participants to mix training with work, either through OJT or through combinations of classroom training or education and subsidized or unsubsidized work.
- Post-placement follow-up services for at least six months after participants obtain employment.

In addition, operational targets should be developed to ensure that a substantial fraction of participants receive human-capital-building services.

Similarly, the enhanced CSE component should include three types of activities in all sites: (1) procedures to identify eligible noncustodial parents and move them into PFS services; (2) effective "carrots" (temporary reductions in support orders) and "sticks" (quick follow-up and tough responses to noncompliance) to encourage and require regular attendance at program activities; and (3) systems to ensure that wage withholding orders are instituted promptly when participants find jobs. These efforts could be facilitated by designating specialized staff to monitor the CSE aspects of PFS cases.

Phase II will feature a random assignment evaluation that will provide the data necessary to determine whether PFS is indeed making a difference. Under this design, eligible noncustodial parents will be randomly assigned either to a program group, which will be exposed to PFS in the same way people made contact with the program during the pilot phase, or to a control group, which will be ineligible for PFS. Because the two groups will be created by selecting randomly from a pool of eligible parents, their members will not differ systematically in any measurable or unmeasurable way. Thus, differences between the two groups in subsequent behavior will be attributable to PFS.

In addition to measuring changes in noncustodial parents' employment rates, earnings, and child support payments, the study will assess impacts on custodial parents' welfare receipt, noncustodial parents' relationships with their children, and on the children's well-being. Finally, the study will address a range of critical questions about PFS, including: Do increases in child support payments (and corresponding reductions in welfare spending) outweigh the expenditures on PFS services and enhanced CSE activities? If there are increases in child support payments, do these improve the economic circumstances of custodial parents and children, or do they affect only government budgets?

The evaluation may also address a variety of broader questions of fairness and equity that are implied by PFS. For example, does the addition of a special "opportunity" for low-income noncustodial parents send an inappropriate message to parents who work and pay regularly now? In an era of scarce resources, would the resources devoted to PFS be better spent on employment and education services for custodial parents? Although these critical questions cannot be answered definitively by evaluators, the study results should provide valuable information to inform the wider debate.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The American family has undergone a striking and well-chronicled transformation during the past three decades. Between 1960 and 1991, the proportion of children living in single-parent families (usually headed by their mothers) nearly tripled, from 9.1 percent to 25.5 percent.[1] This shifting demographic tide has contributed to today's high rates of child poverty and welfare receipt: One out of every five children now lives in poverty, and more than one in eight receives welfare.[2] These developments have pushed policymakers to focus increasing attention on child support as an essential source of income for poor single-parent families. The result has been a series of legislative measures designed to improve the performance of the nation's child support enforcement (CSE) system.

Improvements are vital because most poor single parents currently receive little or no formal child support, and a more efficient enforcement system could collect much more money. It is critical to understand, however, that efforts to increase the contributions made by noncustodial parents (usually fathers) are coming at a time when the labor market prospects of young men, particularly those with limited skills and education, have declined dramatically. This suggests that the payoff from tougher child support enforcement – and its effect on child poverty and welfare receipt – may be constrained by the inability of some noncustodial parents to pay.

The Parents' Fair Share Demonstration (PFS)[3] was created to address this problem. Designed to supplement previous antipoverty strategies, PFS is the first major test of programs that target employment and training and other services to a critical group: noncustodial parents of children on welfare who are unemployed and unable to meet their child support obligations. Its key goals are to increase these parents' earnings and to translate these earnings into child support payments that can reduce public welfare spending and, in the longer run, improve the lives of the children. PFS is funded by a consortium of federal and state agencies and private foundations, and is coordinated by the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC), a nonprofit social policy research organization. MDRC is also responsible for conducting a multifaceted evaluation of PFS.

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[1]U.S. Congress, House Committee on Ways and Means, 1993.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Throughout this report, "Parents' Fair Share" (or "PFS") refers to the approach, the demonstration, or both, depending on the context. Also, the terms PFS "site(s)" and "program(s)" are used interchangeably.

This report examines the demonstration's nine-state pilot phase, which began in mid-1992 (early 1992 in two states) and continued through the end of 1993, for a typical program length of 18 months. The purpose of the pilot phase was to assess the feasibility of operating PFS programs, to determine whether a full-scale evaluation of the programs' effectiveness is warranted, and to learn more about the PFS target population. The conclusion, based on data collected during more than a year of pilot operations, is positive: Despite a variety of start-up issues and some areas where continued improvement is needed, most of the PFS pilot programs operated relatively smoothly. Overall, the pilot experience was promising enough to suggest to MDRC and funders that a rigorous test of the programs' impacts on noncustodial parents' employment rates, earnings, and child support payments, and on aspects of their children's well-being, would be worthwhile. Accordingly, a random assignment impact evaluation[4] will begin in spring 1994 in a subset of the pilot states.

The pilot phase was funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts, the Ford Foundation, the AT&T Foundation, the McKnight Foundation, the Northwest Area Foundation, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the U.S. Department of Labor, and the nine participating states: Alabama, Florida, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, New Jersey, Ohio, and Tennessee.[5]

This chapter starts by examining the policy context for PFS. The next sections describe how PFS was conceived and developed, the PFS service approach, and the purpose and goals of the pilot phase. The final section provides an overview of this report.

I. Parents' Fair Share's Policy Context

The Parents' Fair Share Demonstration is being mounted at a time when welfare reform and antipoverty efforts are once again attracting the attention of federal and state policymakers. Like many recently proposed or enacted measures, PFS attempts to supplement the reform efforts of the 1980s, in this case by focusing on the employment and training needs of noncustodial parents of children on welfare. This section describes the problems PFS seeks to address and previous efforts to confront these issues, and then discusses why additional steps – including PFS – may be needed.

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[4]In such an evaluation, individuals who meet the eligibility requirements of the program being tested are randomly assigned to one of two groups: a program group, whose members have access to the program, or a control group, whose members do not have such access. The *impact* of the program is assessed by comparing the experiences of the two groups over time.

[5]This report has been written mostly in the past tense because it describes PFS structures and activities as they were operating during a particular point in time – the pilot phase of the demonstration. However, all of the PFS programs that were in the pilot phase are still in operation, although not all of them will be part of the next phase of the demonstration.

A. Interlocking Problems

The Parents' Fair Share Demonstration is designed to address a set of closely related problems that currently occupy prominent positions on the nation's domestic policy agenda: the high rates of poverty and welfare receipt among children in single-parent families; the lack of financial support provided to these children by their noncustodial parents; and the dramatic 20-year decline in the earnings of young men, particularly members of minority groups and those with limited education.

The statistical evidence in each area is sobering. One study found that half of all children born in the 1970s and 1980s will spend at least part of their childhood living with just one parent (usually their mother);[6] the poverty rate for female-headed families with children is nearly 50 percent.[7] More than 14 million Americans – 9.5 million of them children – now receive Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), the nation's largest cash welfare program, which primarily serves single mothers and their children.[8]

High rates of poverty and welfare receipt among children in single-parent families can be attributed, in part, to the low levels of financial support provided by their noncustodial parents. In an era when two incomes are necessary to support most families, only slightly more than one-third of mothers living with a child whose father was absent received any child support in 1989, the most recent year for which reliable data are available. This rate was even lower for poor custodial mothers – only about one in four received any payments – and lower still for poor, never-married custodial mothers: Only one in seven received payments.[9]

Low payment rates may reflect the lack of a strong societal commitment to child support enforcement. This, in turn, may help explain several serious gaps in the CSE system. For example, one study found that only 24 percent of never-married mothers receiving AFDC had established paternity for at least one of their children (paternity establishment is a prerequisite for obtaining a child support order when a child is born to unmarried parents).[10] Another estimated that at least $34 billion in potential support goes uncollected each year, enough money to substantially improve the well-being of children.[11] However, given the alarming decline in real earnings and labor force participation among low-skilled young men over the past two decades, it is likely that many of the

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[6]Bumpass and Sweet, 1989.
[7]U.S. Congress, House Committee on Ways and Means, 1993.
[8]Ibid.
[9]Ibid.
[10]Barnow, 1992. More than half of AFDC families are headed by never-married mothers.
[11]Federal government estimate, as cited in the *Los Angeles Times*, December 16, 1993, p. A1.

noncustodial parents who do not pay child support have limited labor market prospects and may need employment and training services and other assistance in order to meet their obligations. The average annual earnings of 25- to 29-year-old men without a high school diploma fell by more than 35 percent in real terms between 1973 and 1991.[12] This decline in the earning power (and hence "marriageability") of less educated men, according to some experts, helps explain the startling rise in out-of-wedlock births in the last two decades, which in turn is a critical determinant of poverty and welfare receipt.[13]

B. Policy Approaches of the 1980s

During the 1980s, most efforts to reduce poverty and welfare receipt among single-parent families relied on two parallel approaches: employment and training services and participation requirements for custodial parents on welfare (most of them mothers), and measures to improve the collection of child support from noncustodial parents (most of them fathers). These twin strategies are embodied in the Family Support Act (FSA), the major welfare reform legislation passed by Congress in 1988. Central to the act is the idea of "mutual obligation." On the one hand, parents – both mothers and fathers – should be the primary supporters of their children. Thus, custodial parents who receive public assistance have a responsibility to participate in employment services and get jobs, and noncustodial parents have a responsibility to pay child support. On the other hand, government has an obligation to provide services designed to promote self-sufficiency when individuals are unable to obtain jobs on their own.

To this end, Title II of FSA created the Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Training (JOBS) Program, which expanded resources and requirements for state programs providing employment and education services to AFDC recipients. FSA's JOBS provisions were built on the results of careful evaluation research conducted during the early-to-mid 1980s, which found that relatively inexpensive pre-JOBS employment programs for AFDC recipients were modestly successful in increasing earnings, reducing welfare payments, and saving money for taxpayers.[14]

In a parallel effort, Title I of FSA includes a variety of measures designed to improve states' performance in establishing paternity for children born out of wedlock and establishing and enforcing

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[12]Center for Labor Market Studies, Northeastern University, unpublished calculations based on *Current Population Survey* (CPS) data.

[13]See, for example, Wilson, 1987.

[14]Gueron and Pauly, 1991.

adequate child support orders. These steps were the latest in a series of legislative initiatives dating back to 1975 that have dramatically increased the federal role in child support enforcement.[15] FSA requires states to use consistent guidelines to set child support orders, to routinely withhold child support from the paychecks of noncustodial parents, and to improve paternity establishment rates, among other measures.

It is notable, however, that FSA's child support enforcement provisions were generally not linked to employment and training opportunities for noncustodial parents who lack the income needed to meet their support obligations. Thus, in contrast to the system of reciprocal obligations envisioned for custodial parents, noncustodial parents faced a one-sided obligation: They were required to pay child support, and government promised to enforce that obligation.

C. The New Generation of Reform Strategies

As states strive to implement the JOBS and child support enforcement provisions of the Family Support Act, state and federal policymakers are already looking ahead to further reforms. For example, they are considering ways to supplement JOBS with additional policies designed to improve the incentives for welfare recipients to go to work and stay employed. These include universal health care coverage, expanded Earned Income Tax Credits for low-wage workers, and formulas allowing AFDC recipients to earn more before their grants are reduced.

Similarly, while FSA's child support enforcement reforms are quite likely to bring about substantial improvement when they are fully implemented, policymakers are already developing additional measures to further strengthen the system. For example, some states have begun to require employers to report identifying information on all newly hired employees to CSE agencies. This procedure provides up-to-date information on noncustodial parents' whereabouts and income.[16]

In addition, it is becoming increasingly clear that new approaches are needed to handle child support enforcement in cases where the noncustodial parent is unemployed or sporadically employed. Reforms that focus primarily on tougher enforcement are likely to have a limited effect on this

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[15]Congress created the federal child support enforcement program under Title IV-D of the Social Security Act in 1975. Under the legislation, each state was required to establish a child support enforcement (CSE) agency (often referred to as a "IV-D agency") to pursue paternity and child support for all children receiving AFDC and for non-AFDC children upon request. Prior to that point, child support had been almost exclusively a state and local issue.

[16]In the absence of this information, CSE agencies generally rely on quarterly wage data reported to state Unemployment Insurance agencies. These data are usually at least six months old by the time they are available.

population for two main reasons. First, these noncustodial parents frequently live and work on the margins of the mainstream economy and are often extremely difficult to locate.[17] Ironically, an unintended result of tougher child support enforcement may be to push a group of low-earning, sporadically working men further into the underground economy, diminishing the chances that they will provide financial stability for their families or boost them out of poverty.

Second, even if they can be located, the enforcement system has few alternatives available to deal with noncustodial parents who cite unemployment as the reason for their failure to pay child support. Although jail may be appropriate for a noncustodial parent who willfully refuses to pay support, it is neither productive nor permissible to incarcerate a parent who truly does not have the means to pay.[18] In fact, some of the nonpayers who claim to be unemployed are actually working "off the books" (or changing jobs so frequently that the system cannot catch them) and refusing to pay support through the formal system. Others are indeed unemployed – as might be expected given the economic trends described earlier – and need help. Unfortunately, in practice, the courts and agencies charged with enforcing child support orders have few means at their disposal to determine the truth in specific cases, since available information on noncustodial parents' earnings is typically several months old.

Faced with these limitations, judges are often forced to resort to stopgap measures such as setting a "purge payment" – an amount the noncustodial parent can clearly pay – and ordering him to pay this sum or go to jail.[19] The noncustodial parent may produce the payment to gain his release, and then return to the cycle of nonpayment. In other cases, judges may order noncustodial parents to seek employment and report back to court periodically, but many courts and CSE agencies are overwhelmed and unable to carefully monitor such "seek work" orders.

Both of these problems are exacerbated by the lack of cooperation offered by both custodial and noncustodial parents, particularly in cases where the custodial parent receives welfare. Under federal law, AFDC recipients are required to transfer their child support rights to the state, which retains, as

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[17]For a detailed discussion of this issue, see Bloom, 1993.

[18]In theory, when failure to pay child support is a civil, rather than a criminal, matter, jail cannot be used to *punish* a noncustodial parent for not paying child support. Jail can be used to *compel* a parent to pay, but only when he has the means to do so. However, this distinction may be blurred in practice because a court may determine that a noncustodial parent is "voluntarily" unemployed and thus has the capacity to pay support. In addition, extended or repeated nonpayment of child support can become a criminal matter, opening up the possibility that jail will be used as punishment.

[19]This report often uses masculine pronouns when referring to noncustodial parents, even though a small (but growing) proportion of noncustodial parents are women.

reimbursement for welfare expenditures, any child support collected on their behalf above the first $50 per month.[20] This means that, in many AFDC cases, neither the custodial nor noncustodial parent has a strong financial stake in the outcome of the formal CSE process, and both have clear incentives to handle support informally, off the books, rather than to cooperate with the system.[21] Ethnographic studies and surveys have described the prevalence of informal and in-kind child support (for example, purchases of gifts or necessities or assistance with childrearing), but neither is counted by most CSE agencies.[22] To make matters worse, many noncustodial parents are convinced that the CSE system is fundamentally unfair, claiming, for example, that their child support obligations often far exceed their ability to pay.

In this environment, it is perhaps not surprising that many CSE agencies, often swamped by caseloads of several hundred, or even several thousand, per worker, either formally or informally assign low priority to nonpaying cases in which there is no clear evidence of income, despite federal rules requiring them to "work" all cases.[23] Locating these noncustodial parents and processing their cases may be costly, and the payoff for this investment is usually minimal, in part because the enforcement options are limited to measures such as purge payments and seek-work orders. Unfortunately, this means that many AFDC child support cases receive limited attention, which sends an inappropriate message about parental responsibility.

Frustrated by this situation, in the 1980s, local courts and CSE agencies in a variety of jurisdictions began to develop procedures that allowed judges to order noncustodial parents into

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[20]Seven states currently apply "fill the gap" AFDC budgeting rules to child support. Under these rules, AFDC recipients may keep child support they receive up to the state's "standard of need" (the amount of money deemed minimally adequate to meet a family's basic needs). Since the need standard is typically higher than the AFDC grant amount, this policy may allow custodial parents to keep more than $50 per month in child support.

[21]The incentives may be different in cases where the custodial parent anticipates leaving the welfare rolls shortly. Cooperation may be seen as more beneficial in these situations because, after she leaves AFDC, the custodial parent can receive the full amount of child support that is paid. In addition, as just noted, "fill the gap" AFDC budgeting rules in place in seven states allow recipients to keep more than $50 in child support per month.

[22]See, for example, Sullivan, 1993.

[23]These case prioritization patterns may be attributable, in part, to the federal financing formula for child support enforcement, which uses federal funds to pay for a large proportion of administrative costs and allows states to keep much of what they collect. Moreover, special incentive payments are made to states with high ratios of collections to administrative costs. Many have suggested that this system discourages states from working with difficult cases, such as those requiring paternity establishment (see, for example, Meyer, 1992). However, recent federal regulations flowing from the Family Support Act require states to take appropriate action on all cases within prescribed time limits and to improve their paternity establishment performance.

employment and training programs when they cited unemployment as the reason for their failure to pay support.[24] In addition to providing courts with a new, more productive option for handling these cases, the new procedures had three other beneficial effects. First, they helped to uncover or "smoke out" unreported employment: Noncustodial parents often admitted that they were working and agreed to pay child support when faced with a program participation requirement that threatened to disrupt their work schedule. Second, those noncustodial parents who needed employment and training help could get it and, if they failed to follow through, the court now had an order (to participate in the program) that could be effectively monitored and enforced.[25] Third, the perception of a more balanced and fairer system based on mutual obligations had the potential to increase the level of cooperation by noncustodial parents, making it easier for CSE agencies to keep track of these individuals.

II. The Parents' Fair Share Demonstration

The preceding discussion illustrates why there may be a great deal to gain by extending the Family Support Act's system of reciprocal obligations to noncustodial parents. This step could simultaneously provide assistance to noncustodial parents facing severe economic problems and increase the effectiveness of the CSE system. Interest in rigorously testing this hypothesis led to the Parents' Fair Share Demonstration.

A. The Development of the Demonstration

The roots of PFS can be traced to the earlier employment programs for noncustodial parents mentioned in the previous section and to a Family Support Act provision[26] that instructs the Secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS) to issue waivers to up to five states to test the provision of JOBS services to noncustodial parents of children on AFDC who are unemployed and unable to meet their

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[24]Early programs were developed in Tampa, Jacksonville, and Tallahassee, Florida; Prince Georges County, Maryland; Grand Rapids, Michigan; Anoka County, Minnesota; Ocean County, New Jersey; six Ohio counties; and in Memphis, Tennessee, among other locations. Several of these programs were later adapted to meet the requirements for entry into PFS and subsequently became part of the demonstration.

[25]Unlike an order to pay child support, which can be complied with only when income is available, an order to participate in a program is within reach of any noncustodial parent who is physically able to show up at program activities. Thus, when a noncustodial parent fails to comply with such an order, he can be held in contempt of court.

[26]PL 100-485, tit. II, sec. 201(b), as codified in 42 U.S.C. 682(d)(3).

child support obligations.[27] In 1990, the Pew Charitable Trusts, the Ford Foundation, and the AT&T Foundation joined forces with MDRC, HHS, and the U.S. Department of Labor to build a demonstration around this skeletal FSA provision. Two other foundations, the McKnight Foundation and the Northwest Area Foundation, later joined the PFS consortium. The Department of Labor's interest was stimulated by proposed amendments to the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA), eventually passed in 1992, which pushed the nation's primary employment and training system to serve more disadvantaged populations such as the one targeted in the FSA provision.[28]

A preliminary research review by MDRC identified a host of challenging operational issues that were likely to confront large-scale programs linking child support enforcement with employment and training, and also confirmed that relatively little was known about the likely target group, the nature of successful employment and training interventions for men, or about conducting random assignment research in the CSE system. Given the dearth of knowledge and programmatic experience, the partner agencies proposed a cautious, two-phase structure for the demonstration that eventually became Parents' Fair Share. Under this approach, the project would begin with an 18- to 24-month pilot phase devoted to assessing the operational feasibility and promise of the PFS approach. If the pilot experience was successful, the partners would agree that the project should be extended to a second phase (referred to as "Phase II") including a full-scale evaluation based on a random assignment research design to reliably assess the effectiveness of PFS programs.

In April 1991, the Secretaries of HHS and Labor invited all states and territories to apply for the waivers described in the Family Support Act and for admission to the pilot phase of the Parents' Fair Share Demonstration.[29] More than 30 states requested application materials and 15 eventually submitted applications. The federal partner agencies reviewed the applications and, in November 1991, approved nine for inclusion in the PFS pilot phase.[30] The pilot programs – referred to as "sites" – are listed in Table 1.1. Table 1.2 displays some basic information about the communities

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[27]Normally, JOBS services are available only to AFDC recipients.

[28]Interest may also have been stimulated by the Jobs for Employable Dependent Individuals Incentive Bonus Program (JEDI), Title V of the Job Training Partnership Act, which provides states with bonus payments for serving noncustodial parents of children on welfare who begin to pay child support after receiving JTPA services. The JEDI legislation has been passed but not funded.

[29]States were also permitted to apply for the waivers without applying for admission to PFS. States choosing this alternative were required to develop and fund an evaluation of their proposed PFS program, and were not eligible for special demonstration grants (discussed below). No states chose this option.

[30]Five of these states were granted waivers under the Family Support Act provision described above. Four others were granted similar waivers under separate authority.

TABLE 1.1

THE PARENTS' FAIR SHARE PILOT SITES

State	Location of PFS Program	Name of PFS Program
Alabama	Mobile County (Mobile)	Mobile County Parents' Fair Share Program
Florida	Duval County (Jacksonville)	Duval County Parents' Fair Share Project
Massachusetts	Hampden County (Springfield)	MassJOBS Parents' Fair Share Project
Michigan	Kent County (Grand Rapids)	Kent County Parents' Fair Share Project
Minnesota	Anoka and Dakota counties (suburban Minneapolis-St. Paul)	Minnesota Parents' Fair Share Program
Missouri	Jackson County (Kansas City)	FUTURES Connection
New Jersey	Mercer County (Trenton)	Operation Fatherhood
Ohio	Montgomery (Dayton) and Butler counties	Options for Parental Training and Support (OPTS)
Tennessee	Shelby County (Memphis)	Tennessee Parents' Fair Share Project

TABLE 1.2

SELECTED CHARACTERISTICS OF SITES IN THE PARENTS' FAIR SHARE PILOT PHASE

State	County in Which PFS Program Was Located	Largest City in County	County Population (1988)	Population of Largest City (1988)	County Unemployment Rate (1992)	County AFDC Caseload (1991)	Percent Nonwhite in County (1988)
Alabama	Mobile	Mobile	377,700	203,260	7.9	6,286	33.2
Florida	Duval	Jacksonville	646,400	609,860	7.0	11,405	26.8
Massachusetts	Hampden	Springfield	444,900	149,410	9.0	14,926	7.6
Michigan	Kent	Grand Rapids	477,500	186,530	7.0	10,031	9.1
Minnesota	Anoka	-- (a)	228,200	-- (a)	4.5 (b)	2,612	2.5
	Dakota	-- (a)	221,200	-- (a)	4.5 (b)	2,182	2.1
Missouri	Jackson	Kansas City	636,400	441,170	4.9	11,446	22.0
New Jersey	Mercer	Trenton	320,800	91,160	6.5	5,006	21.1
Ohio	Butler	Hamilton	271,500	65,050	6.5 (c)	4,370	5.7
	Montgomery	Dayton	566,300	178,920	6.5 (c)	13,675	18.4
Tennessee	Shelby	Memphis	809,600	632,640	5.7	24,266	44.4
National average	--	--	--	--	6.8	--	14.9

SOURCES: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1988; U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1991; U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1992.

NOTES: (a) Anoka and Dakota counties are suburbs of Minneapolis–St. Paul; the counties do not include large cities.
(b) This rate is for the Minneapolis–St. Paul labor market area.
(c) This rate is for the Dayton–Springfield labor market area.

where PFS operates. As the tables show, none of the programs operates statewide; each of them covers either one or two counties including, in most cases, a medium-size city.[31] The PFS population tends to be concentrated in the major city in each site. As Table 1.2 suggests, the PFS communities are geographically and ethnically diverse, and experienced a range of unemployment rates during the pilot phase. One of the pilot sites, Minnesota, began enrolling eligible noncustodial parents in March 1992. The others began enrollment by mid-summer of that year.

B. The Parents' Fair Share Service Approach

Unlike several previous MDRC demonstration projects, PFS does not have a single, strictly defined program model. Too little was known about the PFS target population and the likely results of various service strategies prior to the demonstration to rely on a single, untested model. Moreover, while earlier projects were designed to test the effectiveness of a specific service model tailored to a relatively narrow target population and delivered in a small-scale program setting, PFS aims to test a new *system* of opportunities and obligations incorporating a large, diverse population of noncustodial parents through existing large-scale bureaucracies. This broad objective implies that no single service model is likely to be feasible in all locations or appropriate for all participants.

Despite concluding early on that a uniform program model would be inappropriate at this stage, MDRC nevertheless conducted extensive background research to lay the conceptual groundwork for PFS and identify promising service approaches. This effort included commissioning papers; consulting with a range of academic experts and practitioners in child support enforcement, employment and training, and other topics;[32] visiting the existing small-scale programs for noncustodial parents linked to CSE agencies and other community-based programs serving young fathers; holding focus group discussions with low-income noncustodial parents in three cities;[33] and reviewing past studies of employment and training programs that served disadvantaged men.

The background research led to three broad conclusions, which are discussed further in later chapters. First, the PFS population was likely to be diverse, and it was assumed that at least some of the noncustodial parents would require fairly intensive training and/or education in order to secure

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[31]In this report, the PFS sites are usually referred to by the name of the state in which they operate. However, since the Ohio and Minnesota sites cover two counties each, these programs are sometimes referred to by the name of the county.

[32]Many of the practitioners participated in a special conference in July 1990 focusing on the recommended components of a PFS service package.

[33]These focus group discussions are summarized in Furstenberg, Sherwood, and Sullivan, 1992.

stable employment. However, it also seemed clear that these parents would be impatient to find jobs and income quickly because most would not be welfare recipients and many would face large child support debts. Second, employment and training services alone would probably not be sufficient to induce all noncustodial parents to participate intensively or to make a lasting difference in their employment and payment patterns; the program would also need to address other factors that lead many noncustodial parents to resist working and paying support regularly. Third, if the CSE system practiced "business as usual," noncustodial parents would be unlikely to remain involved with PFS and the likelihood of generating increased child support payments would be low. Changes would be needed to ensure that the noncustodial parents' support obligations reflected their ability to pay, both during and after their participation in PFS,[34] and that CSE agencies could move quickly to translate earnings into child support payments and to respond when noncustodial parents failed to participate in PFS as ordered.

Based on these conclusions, states applying for admission to PFS were required to design programs that could build the capacity to serve at least 300 noncustodial parents during the pilot phase[35] and to ensure that these programs included four core components: (1) a diverse menu of employment and training services with a special focus on on-the-job training (OJT),[36] (2) enhanced child support enforcement activities to ensure that the CSE system could respond quickly and flexibly to noncustodial parents' financial circumstances, (3) peer support groups built around a curriculum stressing responsible fatherhood, and (4) opportunities for noncustodial parents to mediate disputes with custodial parents and others that may affect their child support payments. These four core components are discussed further in Table 1.3 and in subsequent chapters. Sites were also encouraged (but not required) to focus resources on recruiting noncustodial parents who had not yet established paternity

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[34]The state guidelines that are used to set most child support orders do take account of the noncustodial parent's ability to pay, at least to some extent. In addition, federal regulations require CSE agencies to review and adjust these orders periodically, and to respond to modification requests by either parent. However, for a variety of complex reasons – including noncustodial parents' misperceptions about the modification process, characteristics of the state guidelines, and the CSE system's general skepticism about noncustodial parents' income reports – actual support obligations frequently do not match noncustodial parents' current economic circumstances. These issues are discussed further in Chapter 6.

[35]The requirement to serve 300 noncustodial parents was based on early estimates regarding the size of the research sample that would be required for statistically reliable estimates of program effectiveness in a random assignment study.

[36]Under JOBS or JTPA on-the-job training arrangements, an employer receives a publicly funded wage subsidy to defray the cost of hiring and training a disadvantaged individual.

TABLE 1.3

GUIDELINES FOR PARENTS' FAIR SHARE PILOT PROGRAMS:
THE FOUR CORE COMPONENTS

EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING

The centerpiece of Parents' Fair Share pilot programs was a group of activities intended to help participants secure long-term, stable employment at a wage level that would allow them to support themselves and their children. Since noncustodial parents vary in their employability levels, pilot programs were strongly encouraged to offer a variety of services, including job search assistance and opportunities for education and skills training. In addition, since it was important to engage participants in income-producing activities quickly and to establish the practice of paying child support, pilot programs were required to offer opportunities for on-the-job training (OJT), which combines skill-building and immediate income.

ENHANCED CHILD SUPPORT ENFORCEMENT

A primary objective of Parents' Fair Share is to increase support payments made on behalf of children living in single-parent welfare households. This goal will not be met unless increases in participants' earnings are translated into regular child support payments. Although a legal and administrative structure already exists to establish and enforce child support obligations, pilot programs were encouraged to develop new procedures, services, and incentives in this area. These included steps to expedite the establishment of paternity and child support awards and wage withholding arrangements, and quick follow-up when noncustodial parents failed to participate in PFS as ordered, plus flexible rules that allowed child support orders to be temporarily reduced while noncustodial parents participated in Parents' Fair Share.

PEER SUPPORT

MDRC's preliminary research suggested that employment and training services, by themselves, might not lead to changed attitudes and regular child support payments for all participants. Thus, pilot programs were expected to provide regular support groups for participants. The purpose of this component was to inform participants about their rights and obligations as noncustodial parents, to encourage positive parental behavior and sexual responsibility, to strengthen participants' commitment to work, and to enhance participants' life skills. The component was built around a curriculum called *Responsible Fatherhood*, which was supplied by MDRC. Some of the pilot programs also included guest speakers, recreational activities, mentoring programs, or planned parent-child activities.

MEDIATION

Often disagreements between custodial and noncustodial parents about visitation, household expenditures, lifestyles, child care, and school arrangements – and the roles and actions of other adults in their children's lives – influence child support payment patterns. Thus, pilot programs were required to provide opportunities for parents to mediate their differences using services modeled on those provided through many family courts in divorce cases.

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in addition to working with individuals who already had child support orders but were not paying.[37] Beyond these basic guidelines, states were free to design programs to fit their own objectives and perceptions about the target population. As discussed in later chapters, this resulted in substantial variation across the sites, especially during the early months of the pilot. To help readers visualize how this complex and varied approach works, Chapter 2 begins with an illustrative case study and then describes the institutional arrangements in detail.

C. Administration and Funding of the Demonstration

The Family Support Act provision that led to PFS did not include any special funding for the programs for noncustodial parents or for the evaluation of these efforts that was also required. Thus, each of the states participating in the pilot phase received both a waiver allowing it to use JOBS funds to serve noncustodial parents of children on AFDC and a grant from the PFS foundation partners. States were also required to commit their own (or local) resources to the project. State and local spending and the foundation grants could be used to draw down federal matching funds under the JOBS (Title IV-F), child support enforcement (Title IV-D), or AFDC (Title IV-A) provisions of the Social Security Act.

During the planning stage and throughout the pilot phase, MDRC staff regularly visited all of the pilot sites to monitor program operations, identify operational issues, and assess technical assistance needs. Technical assistance was provided in a variety of forms including a manual devoted to each of the core components; site visits by expert consultants focusing on developing and administering OJT positions, operating effective job clubs,[38] and other issues; and two conferences for site staff: a kick-off conference covering a range of implementation issues and a training conference focusing on the *Responsible Fatherhood* curriculum, which is designed to lend structure and focus to the peer support component. In addition, midway through the pilot, senior MDRC staff visited each site for a Program Review devoted to identifying critical issues needing resolution. Each site was asked to develop a plan

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[37]Most of the pre-PFS programs focused on noncustodial parents who had been ordered to pay child support but were not doing so. However, as noted earlier, a large fraction of custodial parents receiving AFDC have no support order, often because paternity has never been established for some or all of their children who were born out of wedlock. Thus, the PFS partners encouraged states to seek ways to use PFS to bring more noncustodial parents into the CSE system, for example, by offering employment services to fathers who have not established paternity for a child receiving AFDC. By their very nature, these "early intervention" programs would have a more voluntary character (at least initially), while "late intervention" programs serving parents who were in default on existing support orders would be mandatory.

[38]Job clubs are short-term group activities that teach job-seeking and job-keeping skills. Participants often begin with some classroom instruction and then move to active, supervised job search.

to address these concerns. Over the course of the pilot, MDRC's technical assistance identified and disseminated promising strategies; this process gradually resulted in a more uniform service approach that could carry over into Phase II of the demonstration.[39]

III. Goals of the Parents' Fair Share Pilot Phase

As noted earlier, the pilot phase was designed to assess the operational feasibility and promise of the PFS approach and to learn more about the target population. The ultimate goal was to determine whether a full-scale evaluation of the effectiveness of PFS would be warranted. This section discusses the administrative challenge presented by this attempt to link child support enforcement with employment and training and the methods and data sources that were used to assess the feasibility and promise of PFS during the pilot phase.

A. The Institutional Challenge of PFS

PFS presented the participating states with daunting institutional and operational challenges. The PFS approach is complex and could not be implemented without the involvement of a variety of disparate organizations and officials, including CSE agencies, local JOBS and JTPA agencies, school districts, family courts, and nonprofit service providers.[40] These state and local partner agencies – many of them large bureaucratic entities – had to work together to develop new administrative systems to identify eligible noncustodial parents, connect them with appropriate program services, monitor their participation in these services, and, since PFS participation is typically mandatory, respond to noncompliance. Such systems require high levels of inter-agency collaboration, new management and staffing structures, and clear lines of communication.

The complexity of this task was magnified by the fact that the two main organizational partners – the employment and training providers funded by the JOBS and JTPA systems, and the CSE system (that is, the CSE agencies) – had little history of collaboration and few incentives to expend resources on the PFS target population.[41] Moreover, their missions and organizational cultures are fundamentally different. PFS asked these systems to reconcile their divergent perspectives, make

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[39]MDRC's research and technical assistance activities were supported directly by the foundation and federal partners.

[40]The institutional structure of PFS is explained in detail in Chapter 2.

[41]JOBS, JTPA, and CSE are all decentralized systems for distributing federal (and, in some cases, state and local) public funding to local operating agencies. All three systems are governed by federal guidelines and oversight, but administrative structures and operational practices differ greatly across jurisdictions.

major changes in their standard operating procedures, and focus their efforts on a long-neglected group. Given these challenging circumstances, the ability of the sites to create coherent, smoothly operating programs was far from certain.

The greatest changes were demanded of CSE agencies. Many observers have described how a mixture of financial and organizational factors have pushed the CSE system to focus on maximizing immediate support collections.[42] CSE agencies are generally unfamiliar with the notion of making short-term service investments in noncustodial parents in the hope of increasing their ability to pay later. In fact, as noted earlier, many of these agencies de-emphasize cases that seem unlikely to yield immediate collections. Moreover, some CSE agencies see themselves as representing the custodial parent or the state in an adversarial process and strongly resist measures that are seen as "coddling" noncustodial parents. PFS pushed the system not only to identify and take action on these cases, but also to invest in the noncustodial parents by temporarily reducing their child support obligations while they build skills.

Employment and training providers are, in principle, much more familiar with investing in the human capital of individuals. However, the key systems that provide employment and training to the disadvantaged, JOBS and JTPA, have had limited experience working with very disadvantaged men or providing the kind of skill-building services sought by PFS. Most JOBS programs have served primarily female AFDC recipients and have rarely utilized OJT, a service that was emphasized in the PFS model. The JTPA system, driven for many years by performance standards stressing low costs and high placement rates, has been criticized for underserving individuals facing severe barriers to employment and for emphasizing short-term services. PFS asked these systems to engage a new population and to offer a broad menu of employment-related services, including some fairly intensive training.

Fortunately, the key changes sought by PFS were generally consistent with recent federal efforts to reorient the relevant systems. For example, the Family Support Act and subsequent regulations require CSE agencies to take appropriate action on all cases within prescribed time frames, and to ensure that child support obligations are periodically updated to reflect the changing economic circumstances of parents. These reforms are the latest in a series of federal measures that aim to transform child support enforcement from an adversarial, court-based system with substantial case-by-

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[42]See, for example, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Child Support Enforcement, 1990.

case discretion to a more standardized, uniform function.

At the same time, the 1992 amendments to the Job Training Partnership Act pushed local employment and training providers funded through that system to serve more disadvantaged populations with longer-term services. For example, under the new JTPA rules, 65 percent of the adults served in each local Service Delivery Area (SDA) must have at least one of seven barriers to employment identified in the law, and performance standards for local programs have been expanded to focus on other outcomes in addition to employment and earnings (for example, acquisition of basic skills). Similarly, the JOBS legislation was designed to push state employment programs for welfare recipients to stress education and training services to a greater extent than had typically been the case under the pre-JOBS program.

Although these federal measures supported the overall thrust of PFS, they did not ensure smooth implementation. As with any attempt to change large, decentralized systems, the federal efforts only gradually affected local practices and organizational cultures. Thus, in many respects, PFS was still cutting against the grain. A key objective of the pilot phase was to determine whether these considerable institutional obstacles could be overcome.

B. Assessing Operational Feasibility

Given the challenging circumstances described in the previous section, the operational feasibility of the PFS approach was in doubt. In order to gauge the ability of the key systems to change and collaborate in PFS, MDRC sought to answer a set of "threshold" questions about each of the pilot sites, using a mixture of qualitative and quantitative data sources described in the next section. The key questions included:

- **Was the site able to assemble a network of agencies to deliver the four core PFS components?** At the most basic level, it was necessary to determine whether the program was up and running in the site and whether there were staff and funding available to deliver the required services. It was especially important to assess whether the site was able to offer a range of employment and training options, and whether CSE agencies were able to target the PFS population for special attention.

- **Was the site able to identify large numbers of eligible noncustodial parents and move them into program services?** The ability of sites to operate large-scale programs is a key test of the policy relevance of PFS. Moreover, large numbers of eligible parents would be necessary to obtain statistically valid estimates of the program's effectiveness in a random assignment evaluation. This was a difficult task given the prior tendency of many CSE agencies to de-

emphasize the PFS population and the heavy workloads facing CSE staffs and courts.

- **Was the site able to develop systems to assign participants to appropriate services, monitor their participation, respond to noncompliance, and follow up when participants found jobs?** In assessing the quality of organizational linkages, MDRC looked for a smooth flow of people across agencies and program components, and for relatively small numbers of people to "fall through the cracks."

- **Do participants receive a consistent message about the goals of PFS?** Given the diverse organizational missions of the key partners, it was critical to ensure that staff from different agencies did not confuse participants by issuing mixed messages about the program's objectives. For example, it would likely hinder the program's performance if staff connected to the CSE system told participants that PFS aimed to get them employed and paying support as quickly as possible, while staff of employment and training agencies stressed the necessity to build skills first. Ideally, all program staff would convey the message that both skill-building and child support payment are essential goals of PFS.

- **Are there mechanisms in place to identify problems and devise joint solutions?** Operational problems are inevitable in any new program. A key test of the inter-agency linkages developed for PFS was whether key staff from different agencies could agree on what the problems were and work cooperatively to develop solutions.

MDRC began by addressing these questions for each site individually. However, in order to determine whether a random assignment evaluation was appropriate, it was also necessary to assess whether at least three to five of the nine pilot sites were strong enough to move forward to Phase II.

C. Assessing the Promise of PFS

PFS seeks to set off a chain reaction of impacts. Ideally, employment and training, peer support, and mediation will produce changes in the attitudes and human capital of participants, which will lead to higher employment rates and earnings. This will both raise the living standards of participants and – with the assistance of enhanced CSE activities – increase the size and regularity of their child support payments. Alternatively, the PFS mandate (that is, the requirement to participate in the program) might help to smoke out previously unreported earnings, leading directly to greater formal child support payments. In either case, increased child support payments could lead to welfare savings and, ultimately, to higher incomes and better lives for children.

The pilot phase was not designed to determine whether PFS is actually producing these impacts. Patterns of employment and child support payments among noncustodial parents are dynamic; thus,

job placements and child support payments made by PFS participants might have occurred even if the program did not exist. A randomly selected control group of noncustodial parents who do not participate in PFS would be needed to isolate the effects that are attributable to the program.

In the absence of a reliable basis for comparison, MDRC sought to determine whether the PFS approach was promising; that is, whether it showed the potential to "make a difference." In order to do this, it was critical to examine whether participants and institutions appeared to behave and operate differently than they did before PFS existed. At a minimum, PFS must provide a package of services and a participation mandate that is discernibly different from what would be available to control group members if there were a random assignment evaluation. Otherwise, a random assignment test might not be worthwhile. This meant assessing whether noncustodial parents who were referred to PFS were sufficiently engaged by the program's employment and training and peer support activities to suggest that the first links in the impact chain described earlier might be affected.[43] Similarly, it was important to look for signs of institutional change and innovative programmatic strategies that signaled that the key partners had gone beyond "business as usual." PFS would be considered promising if it succeeded in providing a package of services and incentives that are not typically available and engaging individuals who would not otherwise have been active.

D. Data Sources

In developing a research strategy for the pilot phase, MDRC sought to obtain the data necessary to address all of the key issues that might affect the decision about whether to move forward to Phase II, while preserving resources for the random assignment evaluation, when vital research questions can be addressed in the context of an experimental research design. In addition, given the lack of previous research on programs of this type, the pilot phase presented an important opportunity to test a variety of research methods and data collection strategies.

The resulting research and data collection plan for the pilot phase provided important information but was also limited in some respects and did not address many relevant or interesting questions. For example, three vital data sources that MDRC hopes to use in Phase II – administrative records on noncustodial parents' earnings and custodial parents' AFDC payments, and surveys – are not part of the pilot phase research effort. Nevertheless, a variety of qualitative and quantitative data sources were used in the pilot phase analysis summarized in this report, including:

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[43]In addition, the services must be intensive in order to have the potential to smoke out unreported earnings.

- **Baseline data.** A one-page Background Information Form (BIF) and a four-page Enrollment Form were completed by PFS staff during intake interviews with eligible noncustodial parents. The BIF, which includes basic demographic information and a brief employment and education history, was completed for all noncustodial parents who were "referred" to PFS. In most cases, these referrals occurred during court hearings. However, as discussed in Chapter 2, the nature of the intake process and the definition of a "referred" participant varied from site to site. The Enrollment Form, which covers a variety of attitudinal issues, was typically completed for noncustodial parents who showed up at the PFS program office for an initial program orientation after being referred. Because some of those who were referred to PFS never attended orientation, in most sites the Enrollment Form was completed for a subset of those who completed the BIF. However, in a few sites, the Enrollment Form was completed along with the BIF for all referred individuals.

- **Management Information System (MIS) data.** Site staff completed monthly reports describing the PFS activities of each individual who completed the Enrollment Form. These reports noted the number of "sessions" of each major PFS activity attended by each noncustodial parent during the month[44] and the reasons for inactivity, and also recorded job placements and attainment of a General Educational Development (GED) certificate. MIS data through June 1993 were available for this report.

- **Child support payment records.** Each of the pilot sites provided computerized data on child support payments for each noncustodial parent who completed the BIF. These records cover one child support case for each noncustodial parent, even though some noncustodial parents owe support on more than one case.[45]

- **Data on child support orders.** In most states, it is impossible to obtain a history of child support orders for a particular noncustodial parent from the CSE computer system; only information about the current order is maintained in the system. Thus, MDRC staff, with assistance from PFS staff in some sites, completed a brief form summarizing the history of child support orders for a total of about 500 noncustodial parents who were referred to PFS by November 30, 1992. The number of individuals for whom these data were collected in each site was proportional to the number of noncustodial parents referred to PFS in that site by that date. As with the child support payment data, the data on support orders referred to one child support case for each noncustodial parent.

- **Field research.** In the course of their regular visits to sites, MDRC operations staff identified and documented a host of operational issues. Their field notes

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[44]The MIS does not cover all PFS activities. For example, orientation and individual meetings with case managers are not included.

[45]When completing the BIF, staff were asked to identify one child support case that had triggered the referral to PFS. If the noncustodial parent had more than one case and no single case had triggered the referral, staff were asked to randomly select one case.

provide vital information on the implementation of PFS. In addition, these staff addressed a set of standard questions about the operation of each site.

- **Peer support feedback forms.** As part of an assessment of the *Responsible Fatherhood* curriculum, the PFS staff responsible for directing the peer support component completed a set of forms describing the group sessions. These forms provided useful information on the attitudes and outlooks of the noncustodial parents and the operation of peer support in the sites.

- **Participant and staff interviews.** Operations staff held informal discussions with staff and participants during their regular visits to the sites. In addition, MDRC research staff conducted structured interviews with seven peer support group leaders and 19 peer support participants in the New Jersey, Ohio, and Tennessee sites. These interviews examined the noncustodial parents' attitudes and circumstances upon entering PFS and their experiences in the peer support component.

The qualitative data used in this report (field research, interviews, etc.) cover almost the entire pilot phase through the late summer/early fall of 1993. Most of the quantitative analyses include noncustodial parents who were referred to PFS (that is, completed the BIF) by February 28, 1993, and examine participation in PFS activities and outcomes during the four months following referral for each individual. Thus, they focus primarily on the early part of the pilot phase.

IV. An Overview of This Report

The rest of this report describes the experiences of the PFS sites during the pilot phase. Chapter 2 introduces the sites and their service approaches, discussing some of the institutional issues that affected the development of PFS at the local level. Chapter 3 describes the PFS population, using a mix of qualitative and quantitative data. Chapter 4 provides general information on the scale of the pilot programs and the patterns of participation in PFS activities. Chapters 5, 6, and 7 focus on the three main components of PFS – peer support (an unexpectedly powerful and engaging element of the program), enhanced child support enforcement, and employment and training – describing the sites' implementation experiences in each area. The final chapter, Chapter 8, looks ahead to Phase II of the demonstration and identifies some of the broad policy questions implied by the pilot experience.

CHAPTER 2

THE PILOT SITES: INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURE AND PROGRAM FLOW

Before moving to detailed discussions of the key program components, this chapter sets the stage with a broad introduction to the pilot sites and the PFS programs. The chapter begins by describing a "typical" PFS experience from the perspective of a participant. The second section focuses on the organizational structure of the programs and the strategies sites adopted to build strong linkages among agencies with different cultures and missions. The third section includes a detailed description of the usual flow of participants through the programs, describing the pathways into PFS and the typical schedules and sequences of program activities.

Diversity and innovation are key themes of this chapter. Each site approached PFS with a different set of existing institutional resources and inter-agency linkages and a distinct vision of PFS; as a result, a unique organizational approach emerged in each community. Each of these approaches had potential advantages and disadvantages, but the pilot experience demonstrated that a variety of strategies were viable. Sites generally succeeded in assembling the organizational pieces needed to operate PFS and, in most cases, found ways to reconcile the disparate goals of the partner agencies to build smoothly functioning programs.

I. A Typical PFS Experience

Ken is a 30-year-old father of two. His children, Sandra and Ken Jr., live with their mother, Marcie, who is receiving AFDC. Ken and Marcie were never married, although they were in a steady relationship when the children were born. They are no longer together, but Ken sees the children about once a week and gets along reasonably well with Marcie and her new boyfriend.

It is now August, and Ken has not held a regular job in eight months. He lives with his mother and sister and does odd jobs for relatives and neighbors to pick up cash. He gives money to Marcie or buys clothes or shoes for Sandra and Ken Jr. when he can. Ken was ordered to pay $150 per month in child support four years ago, shortly after Marcie began to receive welfare. The court has deducted this amount from Ken's paycheck whenever he has been steadily employed, but Ken has been out of work several times since the order was set. He has made no payments since he quit his last job in January after a dispute with his boss.

Two months ago, Ken received a notice to appear at a court hearing to explain his failure to pay court-ordered child support. The notice made clear that Ken could be arrested if

he failed to appear. Ken had some minor scrapes with the police as a teenager and decided to attend the hearing rather than risk being arrested.

It is now the day of the hearing. Ken goes to the courthouse at the scheduled time and, after a long wait, he is called into the courtroom. A hearing officer presides over the hearing. Representatives of the CSE agency and the county prosecutor are also there, but Marcie is not. Ken has no legal representation.

The hearing begins with a review of Ken's payment record. The CSE staff person tells the hearing officer that Ken has not paid support in eight months. Together with previous periods of nonpayment, Ken now owes about $3,000. Ken's purchases for the children and cash payments to Marcie are not counted by the system because they were not paid to the court. (If Ken had paid through the court, a maximum of $50 per month would have gone to Marcie and the children; the rest would have been retained by the welfare department to offset Marcie's AFDC payments.)

The hearing officer asks Ken why he has not been paying support. Ken explains that he has been unemployed for some time and does not have the money to pay. Before PFS existed, the hearing officer would have had few options for handling Ken's case. Not knowing whether Ken was telling the truth about being unemployed, he could have given Ken a choice between going to jail and making a "purge payment" of a few hundred dollars, or told him to look for work; neither of these actions would have solved the problem. In fact, it is quite possible that the CSE agency would not have called Ken into court in the first place because the probability of collecting any money was so low. PFS has added a new option that makes it worthwhile for the agency to take action on Ken's case.

The hearing officer tells Ken that a program called Parents' Fair Share has been set up in the county to help unemployed fathers find work so that they can pay their child support. He asks Ken how that sounds. Ken responds that he could use the help since he has had no luck finding a job on his own. The hearing officer then says that he has decided to order Ken to attend PFS. He explains that he will reduce Ken's child support order from $150 to $50 per month while he is in the program to give Ken an opportunity to get training without building up too much more debt. The hearing officer stresses that this is an unusual opportunity and that he expects Ken to show up and attend program activities regularly or start paying child support. If he fails to do so, his child support order will return to $150 and he will be brought back to court and possibly sent to jail. The hearing lasts less than 10 minutes.

Before leaving the courthouse, Ken meets briefly with a PFS staff person stationed in the court, who provides some additional information about the program and schedules Ken for an orientation session the following Monday at 9 A.M. The staff person echoes the hearing officer's words: This is a real opportunity, but Ken must follow through. Otherwise, he will be brought back to court.

The orientation is held in the PFS program office downtown. Several other noncustodial parents are there. The session is run by a staff person from JOBS, the county's

employment and training program for welfare recipients. Because the county is part of PFS, the JOBS program has been expanded to serve noncustodial parents and several JOBS staff have been assigned to PFS.

The staff person starts by describing the goal of PFS: to help the fathers find good jobs and stay out of trouble with the court. He says that the program offers a variety of services, including job search help, opportunities for training, a peer support group that will give the participants a chance to meet other fathers, and help in resolving disputes with custodial parents. He explains that several agencies have come together to run PFS. Each father will be assigned to a JOBS case manager, who will be his primary contact. Activities will mostly be led by staff from other agencies but will usually take place in the PFS office. He concludes by reminding the fathers that they are expected to show up every day to their assigned activities or call to explain why they cannot attend; if they do not, the case worker will have to notify the court. A staff person from the CSE agency – the same person Ken met just after his hearing – stops in and gives out his business card; he tells the fathers that he is assigned to work with PFS participants and that they should call him directly if they have any questions about child support issues.

After orientation, Ken takes a brief reading and math test and completes some forms that describe his education and work history. He then meets with his JOBS/PFS case manager to talk about his employment goals. They discuss the possibility of a classroom training course, but Ken says he would prefer to go to work. They decide that he will begin with a job club that will help him find employment; it is also possible that the job club staff will help Ken locate an on-the-job training (OJT) position. If Ken does not find a job or an OJT, they will meet again to think about a training program. The job club will start in two weeks. In the meantime, Ken's peer support group will begin meeting in two days in the PFS office.

Ken is skeptical about the peer group but attends the first session anyway to avoid problems with the court. It is more interesting than he expected. The other participants are facing problems that are very similar to his own, and the group leader (the "facilitator") seems to understand what the fathers are going through. They talk about what it means to be a father and how it feels to be unable to support your children regularly, and they learn some practical parenting skills. The group meets three days a week for about two hours a day. By the third session, Ken is attending because he wants to, not because he has to.

The job club starts the following week; it meets every morning from 9 A.M. till noon (peer support continues in the afternoons). The job club is run by an instructor from a local nonprofit organization but meets in the PFS office. Many of the men Ken has gotten to know in peer support are also there. The first week is in the classroom. The instructor helps Ken produce a resume and they videotape a mock interview. The instructor offers Ken some useful tips about how to "sell" himself to an employer.

Late in the second week, Ken begins to search for employment, using telephones and job listings provided by the program; the instructor is present to provide additional tips. This is difficult because few companies are hiring; Ken gets frustrated and misses several

days. The job club instructor lets Ken's case manager and the peer support facilitator know about Ken's absences. His case manager and the facilitator call him at home and encourage him to keep trying. They also remind him that he will be sent back to the court if he misses any more days. Ken decides to give the program another chance. If he had not returned, he probably would have been served with legal papers and charged with contempt of court. Two weeks later, a job developer working with the job club tells Ken about a job opening that sounds right for Ken. He interviews for the job, gets it, and goes to work.

Ken continues to attend peer support one evening a week after he gets off from work. The other fathers and the facilitator help him think about how to deal with a problem with his supervisor at work. Ken is proud of the way he handles the problem; in earlier days, he might have confronted his boss and gotten fired. Ken graduates from the peer support program a few weeks later. His mother, Marcie, and the kids attend the ceremony, which is held in a local church.

Meanwhile, the CSE agency raises Ken's child support order back to its original level because he is now employed. Child support begins to be deducted from his third paycheck. Ken's case manager checks up several times to see how Ken is doing at work. After Ken has made steady payments for three months, his case manager calls to congratulate him for finishing the program successfully. (Not all programs used a three-month standard.) The case manager tells Ken to get back in touch immediately if he loses his job and cannot pay support.

Ken does not exist. He is a fictitious composite character created from the general characteristics of PFS participants, which will be discussed in Chapter 3. Similarly, his PFS experience does not describe any one PFS pilot program. Rather, it draws on the common themes explored in this and later chapters to construct a "typical" route through PFS. Clearly, Ken's PFS experience was quite positive overall; this is obviously not true of all those who are referred to PFS. Nevertheless, his story provides a useful introduction to the day-to-day reality of PFS.

II. The Institutional Structure of the PFS Pilot Programs

Chapter 1 described the institutional challenge presented by PFS: Successful implementation of the PFS approach requires close cooperation among agencies and systems with little history of joint action and fundamentally different missions and cultures. Thus, new linkages and innovative organizational approaches were a prerequisite to mounting the program.

This section examines how sites addressed this challenge. It begins by describing the key factors that shaped the structure of PFS in the sites and then describes the typical organizational

approaches chosen by sites, the strategies used to build inter-agency linkages, and the implications of different approaches.

A. Factors That Affected the Organization of the Pilot Programs

The core PFS components – employment and training, peer support, enhanced child support enforcement, and mediation – are too diverse for any one agency to handle alone. Thus, in each site, a multi-agency network was assembled to operate PFS. Both the identity of the partner agencies and the organizational and financial bonds that linked them were complex and varied from site to site.

The process of developing these networks proceeded differently in each site, but tended to be influenced by a few common factors, including the nature of pre-existing organizational resources and linkages, the source of the main impetus for PFS, and the key partners' visions of the program. Each of these is discussed below.

1. Existing Agencies and Their Linkages. The nature of the PFS service approach and the program's target population virtually ensured that three national systems – the Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Training (JOBS) Program, the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA), and the child support enforcement (CSE) program – would play important roles in PFS. Noncustodial parents would be identified through the CSE system and referred for services delivered at least in part by agencies affiliated with JOBS and/or JTPA. CSE agencies would then be responsible for enforcing the PFS participation mandate and for translating earnings into child support payments. Moreover, most of the program funding would be delivered through these systems.

Because JOBS, JTPA, and CSE programs existed in each of the pilot communities before PFS began, it may appear that the sites began with similar raw materials when they set out to build PFS programs. In fact, however, all three of these entities are less "programs" than decentralized systems for distributing federal and state funding[1] to local public and private agencies.[2] All operate under federal regulations, but the federal guidelines allow substantial discretion to states and localities in designing and operating the programs. Thus, both organizational structures and program approaches vary dramatically across jurisdictions in all three systems.

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[1]The JOBS and CSE systems use a combination of federal and state (and, in some cases, local) funding. JTPA is entirely federally financed.

[2]Of the nine PFS states, Minnesota, New Jersey, and Ohio have state-supervised, county-administered welfare systems. In these states, JOBS and CSE funding is distributed to counties, which are responsible for operating the programs. Alabama has a hybrid system in which the programs are administered by counties but the staff are state employees.

JOBS programs are generally overseen by state or county welfare agencies. In some places, these agencies are also key providers of program services such as job clubs. In other areas, the JOBS agency serves primarily as a broker, coordinating education and training services that are delivered under contracts or agreements by other government agencies, community colleges, school districts, private nonprofit organizations, and others.[3] Targeting strategies and program emphases also vary within the parameters set by federal regulations. For example, some JOBS programs place a heavy emphasis on basic education, while others stress quick entry into the labor market.

Similarly, although each state has a designated IV-D agency that is responsible for child support enforcement (usually the state welfare agency), the key institutional actors at the local level often include family courts, prosecutors, and sheriffs' departments, among others. The roots of these complex arrangements may date back decades to a time when the federal government played only a small role in child support enforcement; the arrangements vary dramatically across states and, in some cases, across jurisdictions within a state. Moreover, local CSE practices are strongly affected by state laws and regulations, case law, and longstanding judicial procedures. Thus, the system's performance and the "street level" reality of child support enforcement vary tremendously across jurisdictions. For example, in some communities, noncustodial parents frequently serve time in jail for child support-related issues; this is much less common in other areas.

JTPA is, in some ways, the most decentralized of the three systems, operating differently in each of more than 600 local Service Delivery Areas (SDAs). The JTPA program in each SDA is overseen by a Private Industry Council (PIC), the majority of whose members must represent the private sector. As in JOBS, there is a wide range of contracting and brokering arrangements in place, and the resulting organizational and programmatic approaches are many and varied.

In addition to experiencing the diversity within these three systems, each community started with a distinct set of public and private nonprofit (and, in some cases, for-profit) agencies that provided employment and training and social services to various disadvantaged groups. Some of these agencies were supported by JOBS or JTPA funding, while others received funding from other local, state, or federal agencies or from private sources.

This diversity meant that each community approached PFS with different organizational resources and existing institutional relationships, particularly among employment and training and

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[3]In some instances, these outside providers receive JOBS funds. In others, they agree to serve JOBS participants using other funding streams such as JTPA or state education funding.

social services agencies. As discussed later, these prior conditions strongly affected their approaches to PFS. In addition, four of the sites – Florida, Michigan, Minnesota, and Ohio – had fairly substantial experience operating programs that linked employment and training services with child support enforcement. The Florida and Michigan programs had been operating for several years, providing mostly job search services to relatively large numbers of noncustodial parents referred by courts or CSE agencies. The Minnesota program, which operated in Anoka County, was smaller, but offered a broader array of services including a component that closely resembled peer support. The Ohio program operated in six counties, including Butler, and provided a combination of JOBS and JTPA services.

2. **The Initiating Agency**. Although applications for the demonstration were submitted by state human services (IV-A) agencies, the impetus for PFS came from a different source in each state. In some cases, a department of the state government made the first move, recruiting or selecting one of its own divisions or another local agency to run the program. In other states, particularly those where local programs for noncustodial parents were already operating, interest tended to begin at the local level, sometimes with a key judge, and the state was engaged to apply for admission to PFS and act as a funding conduit.

Another key distinction was the level of initial involvement by CSE agencies. In a few sites, such as Michigan, a CSE agency was the primary force behind PFS from the outset. In others, the impetus came mostly from a JOBS program or a private nonprofit employment and training agency; the CSE agency was recruited to participate.

Given the important differences in organizational missions described in Chapter 1, the source of the original impetus for PFS helped to shape the site's overall vision of the program in important ways; this, in turn, influenced the structure and design of the program.

3. **Program Philosophy**. PFS aims to achieve a diverse set of objectives: raising the earnings of noncustodial parents, increasing child support payments, and reducing welfare spending, among others. The relative priority placed on these various goals and views about the best means for achieving them varied from site to site. These differing visions were closely linked to the source of the impetus for PFS and the existing organizational resources and linkages described in the previous sections.

B. The Key Agencies and Their Roles in PFS

Given the differences across sites in the dimensions described above, it is not surprising that

they developed quite different organizational approaches as they adapted PFS to local conditions. This section characterizes these approaches by examining the lead agencies and service provider networks that were assembled to operate PFS.

1. **Local Lead Agencies.** Each site's PFS program was built around a "lead agency."[4] These agencies are described in Table 2.1. As might be expected, given the statutory authority for PFS,[5] the most common type of lead agency was the entity responsible for the JOBS program, usually a state or county welfare department.[6] JOBS was the lead agency in Alabama, Florida, Missouri, and Ohio.[7] Public agencies also served as the lead in two other sites. Minnesota's lead agency, the Anoka County Job Training Center (ACJTC), is the local JTPA administrative entity and also operates the county's JOBS program.[8] Michigan's program was led jointly by the Kent County Friend of the Court (a CSE agency) and the Kent County Department of Social Services (which oversees the JOBS program).

In the three remaining sites, the lead agency was a private nonprofit organization. In Massachusetts, the Springfield Employment Resource Center (SERC) has a history of providing education and employment services to ex-offenders and other populations, usually under contract to state agencies. In New Jersey, the Union Industrial Home for Children is a 135-year-old social services agency serving youth in Trenton. Tennessee's lead agency, Youth Service, USA, Inc., is a church-affiliated organization with more than 70 years' experience providing a wide range of services to young people in Memphis and other cities.

In most states, the identity of the lead agency reflected the factors described in the previous

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[4]Technically, each state's IV-A (welfare) agency was ultimately responsible for PFS, since the federal waivers were granted to these agencies. However, in most cases, the state designated either one of its own divisions or a local-level public or private organization to oversee PFS and serve as the lead operating agency for the project.

[5]As explained in Chapter 1, PFS grew out of a provision in the Family Support Act of 1988 that directed the Secretary of Health and Human Services to permit a group of states to provide JOBS services to noncustodial parents of children receiving AFDC.

[6]Florida's JOBS program, Project Independence, is operated by the Florida Department of Labor and Employment Security (LES) under contract to the Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services (HRS), the welfare agency.

[7]In these sites, the CSE and JOBS programs are usually housed within the same state or county human services agency. Thus, these two divisions tended to cooperate closely in administering PFS. However, in each case, the program's overall manager was associated with the JOBS program.

[8]Minnesota's program operated in two counties, Anoka and Dakota. Anoka, which operated the earlier program for noncustodial parents, was the lead county, and ACJTC was the overall lead agency for PFS. In Dakota County, the program was run by the Dakota County Department of Employment and Economic Assistance.

TABLE 2.1

PARENTS' FAIR SHARE LEAD AGENCIES

Site	Lead Agency	Type of Agency	Services Delivered by Lead Agency Staff				
			Case Management	Employment and Training	Peer Support	Enhanced CSE	Mediation
Alabama	Mobile County Department of Human Resources/JOBS program	County human services agency	X	S	X		
Florida	Florida Department of Labor and Employment Security/Project Independence (JOBS program) (a, b)	State labor department	S	S		S	
Massachusetts	Springfield Employment Resource Center (SERC)	Nonprofit education and employment agency	X	S			
Michigan	Kent County Friend of the Court	Child support enforcement (CSE) agency	S		X	X	
	Kent County Department of Social Services	County human services agency					
Minnesota	Anoka County Job Training Center	JTPA agency (c)	X	X			
	Dakota County Department of Employment and Economic Assistance	County human services agency	X	S			

(continued)

TABLE 2.1 (continued)

Site	Lead Agency	Type of Agency	Services Delivered by Lead Agency Staff				
			Case Management	Employment and Training	Peer Support	Enhanced CSE	Mediation
Missouri	Missouri Department of Social Services/FUTURES Program (JOBS program) (b)	State human services agency	X		X		
New Jersey	Union Industrial Home for Children	Nonprofit social services agency	X	X	X		X
Ohio	Butler and Montgomery County Departments of Human Services/JOBS program	County human services agencies	X	S			
Tennessee	Youth Service, USA, Inc.	Nonprofit social services agency	X	S			S

NOTES: "S" indicates shared responsibility.

(a) Since July 1992, the Florida Department of Labor and Employment Security has operated Project Independence under contract to the Florida Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services.

(b) In these states, a local division of the state agency is directly responsible for administering PFS. However, the staff are state employees.

(c) The Anoka County Job Training Center also operates the county's JOBS program.

section. Most of the lead agencies were selected based on their previous experience, usually as providers of employment and training services. For example, the JOBS programs obviously had a history of providing employment-related services to AFDC recipients. In addition, as noted earlier, the lead agencies in Florida, Michigan, Minnesota, and Butler County, Ohio, had previously operated employment programs for noncustodial parents. The lead agency in New Jersey had previously operated a program for young fathers, and the Massachusetts and Tennessee lead agencies both had extensive experience providing employment services to men involved with the criminal justice system.

2. Other Participating Agencies. None of the lead agencies had the capacity to implement PFS alone. Thus, in each site, it was necessary to assemble a network of agencies to operate the program. In most sites, at least part of the PFS provider network grew out of pre-existing organizational linkages forged in the JOBS program or in a previous initiative for noncustodial parents. However, in all cases, it was necessary to recruit new partners and develop new links.

In most sites, the PFS network revolved around a group of two to six case managers employed by the lead agency.[9] These staff typically received referrals from courts or CSE agencies and were responsible at least for conducting initial orientation sessions, assigning participants to employment and training activities and peer support groups, monitoring their participation in these activities, and arranging needed support services.

The core PFS components were administered through a wide variety of institutional arrangements. These structures can be distinguished in part by the scope of the lead agency's role and the range of responsibilities assigned to the case managers. The typical approaches for each component included the following:

- **Employment and training**. In most sites, lead agency staff operated at least some employment and training activities, typically focusing on relatively short-term services such as job clubs or job-readiness training classes. Longer-term services such as vocational skills training and basic education were usually provided by outside organizations – typically JTPA-funded agencies, community colleges, or school districts – under a variety of contracts and agreements.[10] Several of the lead agencies also employed job developers who were responsible for identifying OJT and/or unsubsidized job openings for PFS participants; in other sites, this function was typically contracted to a JTPA agency.

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[9]In both Florida and Michigan, case management responsibility was split between lead agency staff and staff from an outside agency working under contract to PFS.

[10]As will be discussed in Chapter 7, most sites emphasized only one or two kinds of employment and training services in practice.

- **Enhanced child support enforcement.** The IV-D agency was responsible for this component in all sites. In most sites, at least one individual – typically a IV-D employee who had been outstationed or detailed to the PFS program – was assigned to handle the CSE aspects of PFS cases (implementing wage withholding arrangements, coordinating enforcement in response to noncompliance, and so on). In some sites, responsibility for PFS participants' CSE cases was actually transferred to the dedicated PFS IV-D worker. In others, this worker may have been empowered to take specific types of actions on PFS cases, but did not assume ultimate responsibility for them.

- **Peer support.** Almost half of the lead agencies directly employed the peer support facilitators; these staff typically served as both case managers and facilitators. The others contracted with outside agencies to provide this service, and facilitators were usually responsible for this aspect of the program only. The contracted providers included a branch of Goodwill Industries, a community college, a private consultant, family health agencies, and an organization with a history of providing employment and training services.

- **Mediation.** Outside agencies were under contract or agreement to provide formal mediation services in most sites, although lead agency staff provided some mediation services directly.

This information suggests that the complexity and nature of the institutional networks assembled for PFS varied dramatically from site to site. The following box describes four different organizational approaches, three led by JOBS programs (Alabama, Florida, and Missouri) and one led by a community-based nonprofit organization (New Jersey). In all four cases, the lead agency provided some services directly and also served as a broker, coordinating services provided by other agencies. The Alabama and New Jersey structures were relatively tightly consolidated, with the lead agency playing many key roles. The Florida and Missouri structures were somewhat more complex.

C. Building Linkages Among the Partner Agencies

The previous section illustrates that it typically was possible to assemble the key elements of the PFS service package. However, given the complexity of the multi-agency partnerships that developed, one of the key challenges facing sites was to integrate these diverse elements into coherent programs and create smoothly functioning management structures.

Chapter 1 described the important differences in the perspectives and organizational missions of the key systems and agencies involved in PFS. As expected, these disparities led to sharply different visions of the program and produced tension in most sites during the pilot phase. CSE agencies often saw PFS as a useful enforcement tool, but did not always support the program's attempt

Examples of PFS Organizational Structures

Alabama's PFS project was led by the local JOBS program, which is housed in the Mobile County Department of Human Resources. Four JOBS case managers were assigned to PFS, and each was responsible for another element of the program in addition to his or her case management duties: One handled intake, one ran peer support groups, one ran job clubs, and one served as an OJT developer. The Investigation and Recovery (I&R) Division (the CSE agency) was responsible for enhanced CSE activities, although no single staff person was detailed to PFS (there was a liaison who was responsible for coordinating interactions betwen PFS and I&R). Some participants were referred to adult education classes run by the Mobile public school district and to JTPA-funded skills training.

Florida's lead agency was Project Independence, the JOBS program, which is run by the Florida Department of Labor and Employment Security under contract to the Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services. Two PFS case managers were stationed in a PFS program office along with two job coaches employed by Family Health Services, a nonprofit organization. The job coaches were assigned to work with participants facing greater barriers to employment; they also facilitated peer support groups. Both case managers and job coaches helped participants obtain unsubsidized jobs. Another on-site staff person was responsible for developing OJT positions for PFS participants and for leading a job club. Some PFS participants attended training or education courses at Florida Community College at Jacksonville, where a staff person was designated to work with PFS students. A PFS staff person was also outstationed in the CSE office to facilitate the enhanced CSE component.

Missouri's lead agency was the JOBS program, known as FUTURES, which is operated by the Missouri Department of Social Services. Four case managers, known as advocates, were assigned to FUTURES Connection (PFS). Each case manager facilitated peer support groups for his or her caseload. The Division of Child Support, also part of the Department of Social Services, detailed a full-time staff person to handle the CSE cases of PFS participants. Employment and training services were mostly provided by the Kansas City public schools (adult basic education) and the Full Employment Council, the JTPA agency, which provided job-readiness, OJT, and skills training. A state agency, the Division of Employment Services, outstationed a job developer in the FUTURES Connection office.

New Jersey's program was led by the Union Industrial Home for Children, a nonprofit social services agency that previously operated a small program for young fathers. This agency provided most services in-house in a central PFS office; PFS staff included a program coordinator, a peer support facilitator, a job club instructor, two case managers, and an outreach worker. In addition, the New Jersey Department of Labor outstationed an OJT developer in the agency's office. The Mercer County Board of Social Services and the Probation Department jointly operated the enhanced CSE component; each agency used PFS funds to assign a designated worker to the project. Mercer County Community College established a small GED preparation program for PFS participants.

to tie opportunities to the CSE mandate. Thus, as will be discussed in Chapter 6, some of these agencies resisted making routine reductions in the child support obligations of PFS participants to encourage them to build their skills. Chapter 7 will describe how some JTPA agencies, while supportive of the program's overall goals, nonetheless were reluctant to serve program participants in JTPA-funded programs if they faced serious barriers to employment.

The day-to-day interaction between these divergent cultures presented a host of practical management challenges. For example, although each site had one overall manager – typically associated with the lead agency – line staff who were detailed to the program from other divisions or agencies often did not formally report to this individual; the lines of authority may have been complex and confusing to staff. To add to the difficulties, highly specialized managers and staff from the partner agencies usually had very limited knowledge of one another's procedures and jargon; PFS staff literally speak different languages.

Despite these challenging circumstances, almost all of the sites made notable progress in building strong inter-agency linkages. Tensions certainly arose, but they did not cripple the programs. In fact, line staff began to understand and appreciate one another's perspectives and, over time, a unified "PFS culture," combining elements of each of the partner agencies' missions, began to emerge. Several strategies facilitated this process. These included:

- **Central program offices.** Several sites set up special PFS program offices and stationed staff from several agencies in these locations. Thus, in Florida, Massachusetts, Minnesota, and New Jersey, participants came to the same location for orientation, peer support, meetings with case managers, and some employment and training activities, even though these may have been led by staff from different agencies. This brought staff together in a neutral location that was not on any one agency's "turf."

- **Outstationed staff.** Whether or not there was a central PFS office, in most sites, staff from one partner agency were outstationed in the offices of another to promote regular interaction among PFS staff. For example:

  In Montgomery County, Ohio, Dakota County, Minnesota, and Missouri, CSE staff were placed in the lead agency's office to facilitate interaction with PFS case managers.

  In Florida, staff from a nonprofit agency that was contracted to provide peer support and case management worked alongside case managers employed by the lead agency in the central PFS office. In addition, PFS paid the salary of a staff person in a local community college who worked with PFS participants enrolled in education and training

programs and outstationed an employee in the CSE agency to help with PFS-related activities.

In New Jersey, a job developer employed by the state Department of Labor was outstationed in the PFS office to work directly with lead agency staff.

- **Joint activities.** In most sites, staff from the CSE agency, the courts, and other partner agencies regularly visited peer support groups and helped conduct initial orientation sessions for new enrollees. This not only provided important information to participants, but also allowed staff to learn about their colleagues' jobs. In Michigan, staff from the lead agency and the school district that operated the job club co-facilitated peer support groups, and in Alabama, Florida, Massachusetts, and Tennessee lead agency staff regularly sat in on court hearings to meet newly referred noncustodial parents and orient them to the program.

- **Management teams.** To facilitate coordination, most sites formed management teams that included supervisors from the key partner agencies. These teams met regularly to review the program's performance, identify operational issues, and develop corrective action measures.

- **Case conferences.** In several sites, line staff from the partner agencies met regularly to discuss specific cases. This process was formalized in several sites, including Michigan, where lead agency staff, JTPA case managers, and job club instructors met periodically to review all cases with attendance problems.

These and other similar strategies helped build cooperation and mutual respect among staff from different agencies and ensured that participants heard a consistent message about the goals and objectives of Parents' Fair Share.

D. Implications of Different Organizational Structures

Each of the organizational approaches described above had both advantages and potential drawbacks. For example, the identity of the lead agency may have had implications for which of the components operated most effectively. In Michigan, where a CSE agency served as one of the lead agencies, the site identified and referred large numbers of noncustodial parents to PFS. However, it was difficult to build a strong employment and training component in this site. Most of the other sites started with more expertise in employment and training, but had more difficulty building successful identification and referral systems. Similarly, programs with complex provider networks that included many agencies may have benefited from the varied expertise and experience of the partner agencies. However, such programs may have appeared fragmented to participants. In contrast, sites with tightly

consolidated structures may have had difficulty offering a rich array of services, but more success in transmitting a consistent message.

Interestingly, no one organizational structure emerged as superior during the pilot phase, and some of the outcomes were quite different from what might have been expected. For example, several of the sites in which employment and training providers served as lead agencies had difficulty establishing strong employment components. Inter-agency linkages were sometimes stronger in sites with many service providers than in those with fewer. And, perhaps most surprising, CSE agencies often emerged as the strongest supporters of PFS, even in sites where the original impetus for participation in the demonstration came from an employment and training agency.

Overall, the pilot phase experience demonstrated that creative and flexible strategies could compensate for the potential weaknesses of each structure. Finding these approaches required a willingness to experiment and, in some cases, to change existing bureaucratic practices that hindered collaboration. Sites where PFS received the active attention of senior program managers in the key agencies were able to develop these strategies through constant experimentation. Those where the program was not a priority for high-level staff had more difficulty overcoming inherent obstacles. In these sites, existing rules and procedures were more likely to inhibit change.

III. The Program Flow

As described in Chapter 1, the PFS service approach was not defined in detail during the pilot phase. Beyond the requirement to include the four core components, sites were free to design programs to suit their own strengths and philosophies. Many of the same factors that shaped the institutional structure of PFS also affected the service approach, and (as might be expected) a distinct version of the program evolved in each site; however, certain common patterns emerged. This section provides a broad outline of the typical flow of participants through the programs; more detailed discussions of the individual components follow in subsequent chapters.

A. Target Populations

The demonstration-wide eligibility criteria, derived from the Family Support Act provision authorizing the PFS waivers, state that PFS is open to noncustodial parents with children on AFDC who are unemployed or underemployed at the point of referral to PFS.[11] In addition, all participants

[11]If the eligibility criteria ceased to apply at some later point – for example, if the noncustodial parent's children left AFDC – he would be allowed to remain in PFS.

must have either established legal paternity for their children on AFDC who were born out of wedlock, or agree to initiate the paternity establishment process within three months of enrollment.[12]

Most of the sites chose not to add additional demographic eligibility criteria that would have substantially restricted the number of eligible participants. Most required that noncustodial parents live in the county covered by the program or within commuting distance of the program office.[13] A few sites also added age criteria. For example, several limited participation to those over 18 years old. New Jersey and Tennessee, where the lead agencies had experience serving youth, set upper limits on the age; the New Jersey program served noncustodial parents up to age 35 and Tennessee served those up to age 45. Most sites stipulated that eligible noncustodial parents had to be physically able to participate in program activities and to work; thus, recipients of Supplemental Security Income (SSI) were typically ineligible.[14]

More important, however, most of the sites substantially restricted the universe of eligible cases by choosing to focus on noncustodial parents who had established paternity and had a child support order in place;[15] a large fraction of AFDC custodial parents do not have support orders. Chapter 1 noted that states applying for admission to PFS were encouraged to devise strategies that used PFS to reach out to noncustodial parents who were outside the CSE system (that is, had not established paternity). However, most sites chose not to follow this course, in part because it is inherently difficult to identify and locate noncustodial parents who have not yet established paternity; these individuals are, by definition, not known to the system.[16] The challenge of establishing systems to routinely identify, contact, and refer the relatively "reachable" population of noncustodial parents with support orders usually consumed as much staff time as was available. As described below, only the Missouri and New Jersey sites made substantial efforts to recruit noncustodial parents who had not established paternity.

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[12]Participants were also not permitted to enter income-producing activities such as OJT positions until they initiated the paternity establishment process.

[13]MDRC also requested that states accept only cases in which the custodial parent was receiving AFDC in the state. This will eventually allow the project researchers to track AFDC payments for all custodial parents through statewide welfare computer systems.

[14]The SSI program provides cash assistance to needy aged, blind, and disabled people.

[15]In fact, the target group was further restricted because sites could work only with nonpaying noncustodial parents for whom a valid address was known. The reason for this restriction is obvious, but it may have greatly reduced the size of the universe of eligible cases.

[16]It is important to note that all states are developing new strategies to increase paternity establishment rates in an effort to meet performance standards imposed by the Family Support Act. These efforts may include outreach efforts targeted to hospitals, prenatal clinics, schools, and so forth. However, these efforts have generally not been linked to PFS.

B. Client Flow

Although there was obviously wide variation, there were four basic stages in most participants' PFS experience: (1) identification and referral, (2) intake and initial activity assignments, (3) ongoing participation and monitoring, and (4) termination. Each is discussed below.

1. Identification and Referral. Developing regular systems to identify and refer noncustodial parents to PFS was one of the most challenging tasks facing program staff. Because there was likely to be attrition at various stages in the intake process, MDRC predicted that sites would need to identify as many as 1,000 eligible parents in order to achieve the goal of serving 300 during the pilot phase. This process involved extensive and detailed inter-agency collaboration and, in some sites, substantial changes in long-established procedures involving CSE agencies, prosecuting attorneys, and courts. As discussed in Chapter 4, in at least six of the sites, these efforts ultimately produced reliable systems that generated large numbers of referrals on a relatively consistent schedule.

The vast majority of PFS cases were identified and referred to the program through the CSE system. This system is quite complex and operates differently in each locality. In addition, in an effort to meet the pilot phase enrollment goals, each site experimented with a number of referral procedures triggered at various points in the CSE process. Thus, the details of the referral process in each site were complicated and highly idiosyncratic. However, the broad outlines of these procedures were fairly similar from site to site: Nonpaying noncustodial parents with children on AFDC were identified through the course of normal CSE payment monitoring procedures, notified of their nonpayment, and called in for a court hearing or an appointment with CSE staff.[17] As will be discussed further in Chapter 6, in some sites, PFS led to an increase in the number of cases that were processed (or "worked," in CSE parlance) in this manner, or to changes in the process itself, while in others it did not.

At the hearing or CSE appointment, noncustodial parents were asked to explain their nonpayment and, if unemployment was cited, were usually referred to PFS. The nature and language of this referral varied. In some locations, noncustodial parents were first asked if they were interested in PFS. In others, they were routinely ordered into the program without consultation. However, in either case, the end result was usually a PFS participation mandate: The noncustodial parent was

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[17]In some sites, nonpaying noncustodial parents also received a letter inviting them to go directly to the PFS program office, rather than appearing for a hearing or meeting with CSE staff. The response rate to these letters was usually low.

required to appear at a PFS orientation session within a few days, and to participate regularly in assigned program activities. Sites that routinely reduced participants' child support orders did so at this point.

In several sites, PFS staff were present at hearings to meet with newly referred noncustodial parents, provide a brief orientation to PFS, and schedule the orientation. In other sites, court-based staff played this role. Chapter 4 will describe how the response rates to the initial referral differed, based in part on the language of the message and the authority of its deliverer.

Noncustodial parents who failed to appear for their CSE hearing or appointment were usually subject to further enforcement action; if they had been personally served with legal papers informing them of a hearing and then failed to appear, they could be picked up on a bench warrant. In other cases, the hearing or appointment was rescheduled. Those who were referred to PFS and failed to show up for orientation were typically rescheduled and given one or two more chances to appear. If they did not show up at that point or contact the program to explain their absence, they were referred back to the CSE agency for further enforcement action. This could have ultimately resulted in a finding of contempt and a jail sentence, although the likelihood of this conclusion varied dramatically from site to site.[18]

The key exceptions to this general referral pattern were Missouri and New Jersey. In both of these sites, noncustodial parents often appeared at a PFS orientation session without having attended a court hearing or a CSE interview. The New Jersey site recruited "early intervention" participants (that is, mostly fathers who had not yet established paternity for one or more of their children) in two ways:[19] (1) through community outreach efforts aimed at unemployed fathers of children on AFDC, and (2) by using information provided by the CSE agency about the putative fathers of AFDC children who were named by custodial parents during AFDC intake interviews.[20] In both cases, new PFS recruits were invited to attend an orientation session at the PFS program office; the CSE agency was notified later.

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[18]A noncustodial parent who failed to appear at a scheduled PFS orientation but admitted to being employed (and agreed to pay child support) would not have been held in contempt of court.

[19]New Jersey also utilized a court-based referral system much like the one described above. However, it did not begin generating a significant number of referrals until midway through the pilot because there was a delay in hiring a CSE staff person to coordinate the effort. The site continued to use the early intervention strategies after the court-based process began in earnest.

[20]When applying for AFDC, custodial parents are required to name the father of each of their children and to provide information that might help the CSE agency locate him. Normally, this information is transferred to the CSE division or agency, which attempts to establish paternity or pursue support. However, in New Jersey's PFS program, the information was then transferred to the lead PFS agency, which recruited the noncustodial parent and encouraged him to establish paternity and enter PFS.

In Missouri, most participants were identified by CSE staff, but the referral to PFS usually took place by mail or phone, and was essentially voluntary. Interested participants were instructed to go directly to a recruitment meeting with lead agency staff, and there was little follow-up on those who failed to attend this meeting.

2. **Intake and Initial Activity Assignments.** During the pilot phase, PFS participation always began with an orientation to the program – an important early opportunity to shape the program's message to participants. Sites held either group or individual orientations periodically, depending on the flow of new participants. The content and length of orientation sessions varied; some sites focused primarily on describing the PFS program and its components, while others included basic skills testing or other assessment activities. In Anoka County, Minnesota, this process sometimes took several days.

After orientation, participants usually joined a peer support group. As will be discussed further in Chapter 5, this sequence was generally chosen because staff discovered that peer support often helped participants handle the anger and resentment many of them felt about being required to participate in PFS, thereby increasing their ability to benefit from employment preparation activities. In several sites, including Missouri, New Jersey, and Tennessee, participants usually completed the full *Responsible Fatherhood* curriculum in their peer support groups before moving to employment and training activities. Completion of the curriculum took two to five weeks. In the other sites, participants started employment and training activities shortly after beginning peer support, and remained active in both components concurrently. Peer support tended to meet two to three times per week in these sites, and continued for varying lengths of time. The sequence of employment and training activities and the criteria for assigning noncustodial parents to activities varied considerably, as will be discussed in Chapter 7. In any case, participants were usually expected to attend PFS activities at least three days per week during their entire eligibility period unless they were waiting for a scheduled activity to begin.

3. **Participation.** PFS case managers monitored participants' attendance at their assigned activities. Most contracted service providers reported on participants' attendance weekly. Each program developed standards of acceptable attendance, usually involving a maximum number of absences without an excuse. The steps taken in response to poor attendance varied from site to site. Some programs attempted to counsel the participant and to identify and resolve barriers to attendance before referring him to the CSE agency; others more routinely referred the participant's name to the

PFS/CSE staff person, who coordinated further enforcement action. This usually involved a contempt hearing which could, in theory, result in a jail sentence.

4. Termination. The end of PFS participation usually came when a participant was employed and had paid child support for a specified number of months, or failed to cooperate and was referred back to the court or CSE agency for enforcement action.[21] In some cases, participants remained active in peer support or other program activities after they found jobs. The extent of post-placement follow-up varied; as the pilot progressed, MDRC began to encourage sites to increase the amount of contact with employed participants to help increase job retention.

IV. Conclusions

The organizational resources needed to build a PFS program exist in most communities and, for the most part, the PFS pilot sites succeeded in assembling multi-agency networks to operate the program. These networks looked quite different – reflecting the wide variation in the pre-existing organizational landscape in each site – but the key pieces were put in place. The challenge was to manage these diverse partners and to blend their different organizational procedures and perspectives into smoothly running programs. Although tensions emerged in all sites, most made notable progress toward building strong inter-agency linkages. Active attention by senior level staff in the key agencies was vital to achieving this goal.

[21]In many cases, noncustodial parents who were found in contempt of court were referred back to the PFS program; that is, they were given another chance before being sentenced to jail.

CHAPTER 3

THE NONCUSTODIAL PARENTS

This chapter uses a variety of data sources to characterize the backgrounds, attitudes, and life circumstances of the noncustodial parents who were referred to PFS during the pilot phase. The first section describes the data that were used in the analysis, briefly reviews some of the findings from previous research about noncustodial parents, and offers some cautionary notes about the generalizability of the information presented in this chapter. The following sections focus on the demographics and economic status of the PFS noncustodial parents and on their relationships and attitudes.

In general, much less is known about the noncustodial parents of children on welfare than about the custodial parents. This is in part because custodial parents are, by definition, part of a mainstream social services delivery system, while noncustodial parents may not be part of such a system and may not work steadily in the mainstream economy. Moreover, many of the noncustodial parents of AFDC children have not (by legal standards) been identified. These factors make it difficult to study them using traditional data sources such as surveys – which require reliable information on respondents' whereabouts – and administrative records of reported employment and earnings maintained by government agencies. Thus, while PFS pilot programs primarily touched only a subset of the noncustodial parent population – those with child support orders in place for at least one of their children – the project has provided an unusual opportunity to study and learn about this important group.

The pilot phase data show that the PFS noncustodial parents were a diverse group; however, many appeared to be living in poverty and facing substantial barriers to employment. Most reported very little recent employment and said that their previous employment patterns had been unstable at best; many said they had trouble meeting their basic needs. These data appear to confirm the key premise behind PFS: that lack of income presents a serious obstacle to payment of child support for many noncustodial parents of AFDC children.

Most of the PFS noncustodial parents said that they cared deeply about their children, had regular contact with them, and thought it important to provide support. However, their views of fatherhood were often narrow, and their actual child support payment patterns were clearly sporadic. Moreover, it is clear that these parents' definitions of "support" were often inconsistent with those of the CSE system. When they paid at all, the PFS parents strongly preferred to make informal, direct

payments, which are seldom recognized by the system. Finally, it seems clear that many of the parents were angry and frustrated when they entered PFS. They were disconnected from the mainstream economy and society, and deeply skeptical of the program's motives and its ability to help them.

I. Issues Involved in an Examination of the PFS Target Group

Before discussing the PFS noncustodial parents in detail, it is important to provide some contextual information. This section describes the data sources used to study the PFS population, explains how this group fits into the broader population of noncustodial parents, and reviews some relevant findings from previous research on noncustodial parents.

A. Data Sources Used in This Analysis

This chapter uses three types of information to paint a picture of the PFS population at the point the noncustodial parents entered PFS. These data sources, described in more detail in Chapter 1, are: (1) the Background Information Form (BIF) and the Enrollment Form, which were completed by PFS staff during brief interviews with noncustodial parents at the point they entered PFS; (2) lengthier interviews conducted by MDRC staff with peer support facilitators and other program staff in several of the pilot sites and analysis of the peer support feedback forms described in Chapter 1; and (3) 30- to 60-minute interviews with 19 PFS participants who had completed (or nearly completed) the peer support component in New Jersey, Montgomery County, Ohio, and Tennessee.[1]

Each of these data sources has strengths and weaknesses. The BIF and Enrollment Form data provide a broad view of the demographic characteristics and attitudes of the noncustodial parents who were referred to PFS. However, the information on the forms is necessarily limited. Moreover, because the BIF was usually completed in court, just after a hearing concerning nonpayment of child

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[1]Although obviously not representative of the full PFS population (since all had completed or almost completed the peer support curriculum), the interviewees were diverse, and their characteristics were similar to those of the group that completed the BIF (discussed below). They were between 23 and 45 years old; most were in their late twenties and early thirties. Thirteen were African-American, five were white, and one was Hispanic. Most of the interviewees had from one to three children, with either one or two women. One had 12 children with eight different mothers. One way in which their characteristics differed from those of the full group that completed the BIF was that a much larger proportion of the interviewees (7 of 19) said they lived with at least some of their children full-time; others seemed to live with some of their children part of the time. It is not clear whether this was an aberration or a sign of inaccurate reporting on the BIF and Enrollment Form.

support, noncustodial parents may have had strong incentives to report some items inaccurately, particularly those involving current and recent employment and living arrangements. It is likely that many of the parents perceived that the staff who collected these data were part of the CSE system and, consequently, that their responses would affect the handling of their cases. The same issue may affect the Enrollment Form data to some extent, although this form was often completed at the PFS program office rather than in court.

Confidential staff and participant interviews provided an opportunity to examine some important questions in greater depth in a more relaxed environment. This probably resulted in more complete and accurate information. However, such interviews necessarily overrepresented the experiences of noncustodial parents who participated extensively in PFS activities. These parents were both more familiar to staff and more likely to have made themselves available for interviews.[2]

B. The Representativeness of the PFS Sample

In assessing the data presented in this chapter, it is critical to remember that PFS targets a small, potentially unrepresentative subset of all noncustodial parents. In fact, this group may be atypical in some ways of noncustodial parents with children on welfare. Thus, great care should be taken in generalizing these data beyond the group to which they refer.

First, for statutory reasons, the program is only open to noncustodial parents with children currently receiving AFDC. Clearly, children on welfare represent a distinct subset of all children living apart from one of their parents. Second, for programmatic reasons discussed in Chapter 2, the PFS pilot programs primarily served noncustodial parents who had a child support order in place but were not paying. National data show that fewer than half of all poor mothers living with a child whose father is absent were awarded support payments in 1989;[3] the figure for AFDC recipients may be even lower than this in many states. Moreover, AFDC noncustodial parents who have support orders probably differ systematically from those who do not have orders.[4] Similarly, those who have orders and pay regularly probably differ from those who do not. The nature and size of these subgroups relative to the full universe of AFDC noncustodial parents in a particular jurisdiction depend

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[2]For Phase II of the demonstration, there are plans to undertake more extensive qualitative or ethnographic research that will not be restricted to participants.

[3]U.S. Congress, House Committee on Ways and Means, 1993.

[4]One study noted that ability to pay is probably greater among noncustodial parents who currently have support orders than among those who do not have orders (Garfinkel and McLanahan, 1990).

heavily on the efforts of the local CSE agency to establish and enforce support orders for AFDC children.

Figure 3.1 illustrates how the group of potential PFS participants was further shaped by the program intake process. Because there was attrition at each stage in this process, only a fraction of all potentially eligible parents were actually referred to PFS. Some nonpaying noncustodial parents were never contacted by CSE agencies (for example, because the system had no recent address for them). Some of those who were contacted failed to show up for scheduled hearings or appointments, or admitted they were working and agreed to pay support without being referred to PFS.[5] Once again, it is quite likely that the noncustodial parents who ultimately arrived at the point where the BIF was completed differed in important ways from the broader group of nonpaying parents with orders from which they were drawn.

Ultimately, during the pilot phase, the BIF was completed only for individuals who were referred to PFS, a subgroup that could be defined as nonpaying noncustodial parents of AFDC children whose whereabouts were known to the system and who showed up for a hearing or interview claiming to be unemployed. It is clear why this group should not be assumed to represent all noncustodial parents, or even all noncustodial parents of children receiving AFDC.[6] However, this group probably did represent the population that will be served during Phase II of the PFS project and in other future programs of this type.

C. Existing Knowledge About Noncustodial Parents

Although the PFS target group represents a relatively narrow slice of all noncustodial parents, it is nonetheless useful to briefly review the findings from a few previous studies that examined noncustodial parents in general or subsets of this population that may resemble the PFS group.

1. General Findings. It is difficult for researchers to obtain general information about the behavior and characteristics of noncustodial parents because there are few national data sets that reliably identify all parents who live apart from one or more of their children.[7] In the absence of

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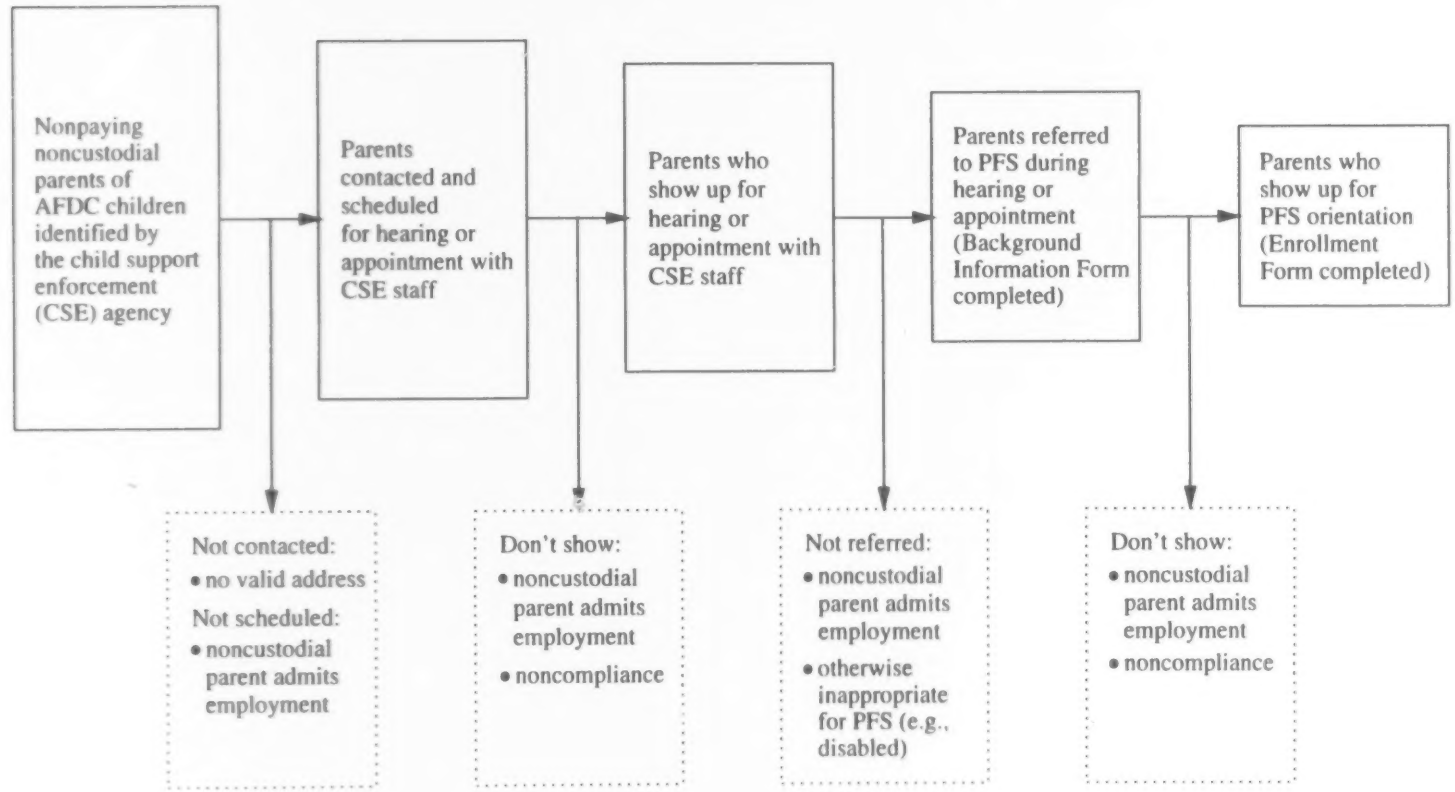
[5]As noted elsewhere, some of this "smoke-out" effect was directly attributable to PFS (that is, noncustodial parents found or admitted to employment in order to avoid the PFS mandate). This means that the BIF sample did not include all noncustodial parents who were affected by PFS during the pilot phase.

[6]In addition to the factors cited in this section, it should be noted that the communities where PFS operated during the pilot phase were not chosen on the basis of their representativeness but rather on the basis of applications submitted by states.

[7]Many surveys identify divorced or separated men. However, this is not equivalent to noncustodial parents because some divorced or separated men are not parents, and some noncustodial parents are not divorced or separated (some are currently married and some were never married).

FIGURE 3.1

SIMPLIFIED DEPICTION OF THE PARENTS' FAIR SHARE INTAKE "FUNNEL"


Nonpaying noncustodial parents of AFDC children identified by the child support enforcement (CSE) agency
Parents contacted and scheduled for hearing or appointment with CSE staff
Parents who show up for hearing or appointment with CSE staff
Parents referred to PFS during hearing or appointment (Background Information Form completed)
Parents who show up for PFS orientation (Enrollment Form completed)
Not contacted:
• no valid address
Not scheduled:
• noncustodial parent admits employment
Don't show:
• noncustodial parent admits employment
• noncompliance
Not referred:
• noncustodial parent admits employment
• otherwise inappropriate for PFS (e.g., disabled)
Don't show:
• noncustodial parent admits employment
• noncompliance

such data, several studies have used information reported by custodial parents to describe the characteristics and behavior of noncustodial parents.

For example, one study[8] examined three components of noncustodial fathers'[9] roles in their children's lives – visitation, child support, and participation in childrearing decisions – using responses given by custodial mothers in the large-scale National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH). These data are potentially relevant to PFS because certain issues concerning the relationships between noncustodial fathers and their children clearly cut across socioeconomic groups.

Overall, the study found low levels of contact between noncustodial fathers and their children: About 40 percent of the children had visited with their noncustodial father only once or not at all in the past year; among those who did visit, less than a third spent any extended time with their father.[10] Moreover, according to the custodial parents' reports, more than half of noncustodial parents had no influence over key childrearing decisions, and only 47 percent paid any child support.

The study also found that the three components – contact, child support, and involvement in childrearing – were closely related: Noncustodial fathers who were active in one way were likely to be active in the others as well. All three activities were more prevalent when the parents had been married and were also positively associated with the father's socioeconomic status.[11] All three also tended to decline over time. In addition, African-American noncustodial parents were somewhat more likely than whites to be in contact with their children.

Another study[12] used results from the same survey to examine conflict between custodial mothers and noncustodial fathers over a range of issues including where the child lives, how the child is raised, visitation, child support, and how both parents spend money on the child. In general, serious conflict was rare: 80 to 90 percent of mothers reported no conflict over most issues. The incidence of conflict over child support was somewhat higher: About 30 percent reported at least some conflict over this issue. The general lack of contact between fathers and children may help to explain the low levels of conflict. As will be discussed later in this chapter, PFS noncustodial parents reported both more contact with their children and more conflict with the custodial parents than did NSFH mothers.

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[8]Seltzer, 1991.

[9]As noted in Chapter 1, not all noncustodial parents are fathers.

[10]Extended contact was defined as spending more than a weekend together.

[11]The study did not include information on the fathers' socioeconomic status. However, the authors concluded that the mothers' education level – which was positively associated with the fathers' involvement – could probably serve as a proxy for the fathers' socioeconomic status.

[12]Hanson, 1993.

2. **Studies of Subgroups of Noncustodial Parents.** Other studies have focused on subgroups of low-income noncustodial parents that are more similar to the PFS target group. These studies are especially important because, in the absence of reliable data, the popular portrait of these parents is fueled mainly by stereotypes and anecdotes about "deadbeat dads."

One set of studies – triggered by efforts to improve the CSE system – has attempted to estimate the incomes of noncustodial parents of AFDC children. The results have varied, but these studies provide some evidence about what fraction of AFDC noncustodial parents lack income to pay child support (and, thus, what fraction might be appropriate for a PFS-like intervention). For example, one study[13] used tax records to estimate the annual income of AFDC noncustodial parents in Wisconsin in 1980, reaching a figure of $11,182. Another[14] surveyed noncustodial parents in the North Carolina AFDC IV-D caseload, finding an average income of only $6,653 during 1983; moreover, a third of these fathers had no earnings reported in the state Employment Security records for at least half the year. A third study[15] looked at the incomes over time of fathers of children born outside marriage in Wisconsin who had established paternity in Family Court. It found that incomes were quite low initially – 66 percent of fathers in their early twenties either had no income or earned less than $10,000 (in 1988 dollars) at the time of the paternity petition – but grew substantially over time. A fourth study[16] examined more than 4,000 "hard-core" AFDC CSE cases in several states, in which the IV-D agency knew the noncustodial parent's Social Security number but there was either no child support order, an order for $50 a month or less, or an arrearage (this included cases in which paternity had not been established). The study, which used Social Security Administration earnings data, found that 73 percent of the noncustodial parents had earnings below $10,000 in 1985; this figure had decreased to 69 percent by 1987. One difficulty that confronts all of these efforts is that many of the noncustodial parents of children on welfare are not legally identified. This makes it impossible to examine the full population.[17]

Other studies have produced a broader set of descriptive information about subgroups of noncustodial parents. For example, one small survey, the Survey of Absent Parents (SOAP), contacted matched pairs of custodial and noncustodial parents in Ohio and Florida. One group of sample

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[13]McDonald, Moran, and Garfinkel, 1990.

[14]Haskins, 1985.

[15]Meyer, 1992.

[16]U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Inspector General, 1991.

[17]This suggests that these estimates may be overstated if noncustodial parents who are identified have higher incomes than those who are not.

members was drawn from the CSE caseload.[18] Among this group, nearly half of noncustodial parents reported that their relationship with the custodial parent just after their separation was friendly. About half reported weekly contact with their children, and a large majority reported paying some child support. Custodial parents reported less frequent visitation by noncustodial parents and lower levels of payment by them than the noncustodial parents reported.[19] In terms of their economic status, the CSE noncustodial parents reported average incomes of $8,000 to $10,000 and poverty rates ranging from 38 to 49 percent in 1985.[20]

One extensive study of young unwed fathers was made using data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY). This study covered a wide variety of issues and found, for example, that more than half of the young unwed fathers who resided away from their children said they lived with one or both of their parents. In contrast to popular stereotypes, most of the fathers reported having only one child. As in the SOAP, visitation levels reported by the NLS fathers were higher than those reported by custodial parents in the NSFH: Nearly half of the young unwed fathers reported visiting their youngest child at least once a week. However, the frequency of visitation declined sharply over time as the children got older. Moreover, only a little more than a third of the young fathers reported paying any child support. As in the NSFH, visitation and child support were closely associated, and African-American fathers were more likely than whites to report living near their children and seeing them frequently.[21]

Finally, several ethnographic or qualitative studies have examined small groups of noncustodial parents in much greater depth. One such study focused on 24 teen fathers in two inner-city communities in New York City. Most of the young fathers in a predominantly African-American neighborhood had acknowledged paternity within their communities and were attempting to provide some support and/or care for their children. Most condemned the behavior of young men who neglected their parental responsibilities (while admitting that they knew many young men who did so). However, both paternity and support tended to be handled informally. While the community recognized the young men's efforts in both areas, there was strong resistance to involving the courts or public agencies. Thus, from the perspective of the CSE system, few of these young fathers were

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[18]This included both AFDC and non-AFDC cases.

[19]For example, among the CSE cases in Florida, 28 percent of custodial parents and 51 percent of noncustodial parents reported weekly visits in the prior 12 months. The corresponding figures in Ohio were 31 percent for custodial parents and 43 percent for noncustodial parents.

[20]Sonenstein and Calhoun, 1988.

[21]Lerman, 1986; Lerman, 1993.

providing any support. The study also found that patterns of support were dynamic, shifting frequently as the young fathers moved in and out of work, school, and underground or criminal activity. Children tended to be supported by a shifting mixture of public assistance, child support, and earned income, with responsibilities shared across networks of extended families.[22]

Another ethnographic study of inner-city African-American teenage boys and young men described somewhat different patterns of support. This study found that the lack of access to jobs and peer pressure make many young African-American men unable or unwilling to assume the responsibilities of fatherhood. Although there is strong pressure to have sex and to father children, these young men had little interest in stable family situations; the author speculated that their lack of economic prospects decreased their ability to control these households.[23]

II. Demographic Characteristics of the PFS Noncustodial Parents

Table 3.1 presents some key demographic characteristics of the 2,404 noncustodial parents who were referred to PFS by February 28, 1993. The data, drawn from the Background Information Form, are reported by site and for all sites combined.

A. Basic Demographics

As expected, the vast majority of noncustodial parents are male. Nearly half of the parents were over 30 years old, and 37 percent were 25 years old or younger. Nearly 60 percent had never been married.[24]

Overall, the population was about two-thirds African-American and one-third white; 6 percent were Hispanic. However, in five of the nine sites – Alabama, Florida, Missouri, New Jersey, and Tennessee – the population was overwhelmingly African-American. The white parents were concentrated in the remaining four sites; most of the Hispanic participants were in Massachusetts.

Some participants and observers see the composition of the PFS population as evidence of racial bias in the criminal justice and CSE systems. They contend that the PFS population includes a disproportionate number of African-American noncustodial parents because these individuals are more likely to be "caught" when they do not pay child support.[25] Although data are not available in all

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[22]Sullivan, 1993.

[23]Anderson, 1993.

[24]Nationally, more than half of AFDC custodial parents have never been married.

[25]Some observers have suggested that many of the noncustodial parents who are brought to court for failure to pay child support have been arrested for some other offense; the police rarely arrest someone solely (continued...)

TABLE 3.1

CHARACTERISTICS OF NONCUSTODIAL PARENTS REFERRED TO PARENTS' FAIR SHARE PILOT PROGRAMS, BY SITE

Characteristic	Alabama	Florida	Massachusetts	Michigan	Minnesota: Anoka	Minnesota: Dakota	Missouri	New Jersey	Ohio: Butler	Ohio: Mont.	Tennessee	All Sites
Demographic information												
Gender (%)												
Men	99.4	95.3	98.7	99.1	94.2	96.2	96.4	99.6	83.6	98.6	99.3	97.4
Women	0.6	4.7	1.3	0.9	5.8	3.8	3.6	0.4	15.7	1.4	0.3	2.5
Age (%)												
Under 18	1.3	0.0	1.3	0.5	0.0	0.0	1.4	3.2	0.0	0.0	0.7	0.8
18–21	16.0	12.8	12.3	16.9	7.1	4.8	16.4	21.5	10.4	10.7	9.4	13.2
22–25	21.2	15.5	18.9	26.0	20.5	22.9	13.6	27.9	17.9	19.2	33.2	22.8
26–29	18.6	17.6	24.6	19.4	13.5	18.1	22.9	22.3	19.4	18.4	19.8	19.7
30 and over	42.9	54.1	43.0	37.0	59.0	54.3	45.0	25.1	52.2	51.7	36.9	43.4
Marital status (%)												
Never married	70.5	45.3	50.9	65.5	36.5	45.7	58.6	86.2	34.3	50.3	68.8	58.6
Married, living with spouse	8.3	18.2	10.5	7.3	10.3	4.8	5.0	4.0	23.9	8.5	7.7	9.1
Separated	9.0	16.2	21.1	9.1	14.1	13.3	24.3	5.3	9.7	7.9	16.1	12.4
Divorced	11.5	18.9	16.2	16.9	37.8	21.9	12.1	2.4	31.3	32.2	7.0	18.3
Widowed	0.6	0.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.7	0.0	0.3	0.2
Ethnicity (%)												
White, non–Hispanic	2.6	10.8	30.3	32.4	92.9	85.7	5.7	2.0	74.6	33.9	0.3	29.1
Black, non–Hispanic	97.4	87.8	30.3	59.1	2.6	9.5	90.7	89.1	24.6	65.0	99.7	63.7
Hispanic	0.0	0.7	38.2	6.6	0.6	2.9	2.9	5.3	0.7	0.8	0.0	5.9

(continued)

TABLE 3.1 (continued)

Characteristic	Alabama	Florida	Massa-chusetts	Michigan	Minnesota		Missouri	New Jersey	Ohio		Tennessee	All Sites
					Anoka	Dakota			Butler	Mont.		
Number of children (%)												
1	26.9	27.0	41.7	37.9	31.4	34.3	32.9	43.3	30.6	24.3	27.2	32.8
2	29.5	28.4	22.4	27.6	28.2	34.3	27.9	27.5	30.6	33.9	29.9	29.0
3	21.2	18.2	18.9	18.7	20.5	13.3	17.9	15.4	20.1	15.8	24.2	18.7
4	11.5	12.2	10.1	8.0	11.5	12.4	10.0	8.5	9.7	11.0	8.7	9.9
5 or more	10.9	12.8	7.0	7.5	7.7	5.7	11.4	3.6	9.0	14.7	10.1	9.2
Number of partners with whom he or she had children (%)												
1	50.0	45.3	67.5	62.6	69.2	49.5	48.6	60.3	55.2	54.2	46.0	56.3
2	29.5	36.5	22.4	25.3	24.4	42.9	31.4	29.6	30.6	30.5	34.6	29.7
3	16.0	9.5	5.3	7.3	6.4	3.8	15.7	7.3	11.2	9.9	12.8	9.4
4 or more	4.5	7.4	1.3	3.2	0.0	1.9	2.9	1.2	3.0	4.8	4.4	3.2
Number of own children in household (%)												
0	82.1	81.1	81.1	85.6	79.5	81.0	88.6	90.3	81.3	83.6	82.2	83.8
1	10.9	8.1	11.0	7.1	10.9	14.3	8.6	6.5	11.9	9.6	10.4	9.4
2	3.8	6.1	3.5	5.9	5.8	3.8	1.4	2.0	3.0	5.1	5.0	4.4
3	3.2	4.7	4.4	1.4	3.8	1.0	1.4	1.2	3.7	1.7	2.3	2.4
Lived with father at age 14 (%)	46.8	43.2	55.7	48.2	59.0	63.8	41.4	35.6	58.2	50.6	37.6	47.8
At 14, lived with an adult who worked full time (%)	72.4	79.7	63.6	77.4	87.2	85.7	83.6	79.8	77.6	78.2	76.8	77.6
Employment												
Employment status (%)												
Employed	25.0	12.8	11.4	4.6	42.3	23.8	19.3	11.3	8.2	6.5	1.7	12.0
Unemployed	75.0	86.5	88.6	95.2	57.7	76.2	80.7	87.0	91.8	93.2	98.3	87.7

(continued)

TABLE 3.1 (continued)

Characteristic	Alabama	Florida	Massa-chusetts	Michigan	Minnesota		Missouri	New Jersey	Ohio		Tennessee	All Sites
					Anoka	Dakota			Butler	Mont.		
Length of unemployment (%)												
Under 3 months	20.5	18.2	18.0	26.0	16.7	26.7	20.0	18.6	23.1	19.5	16.4	20.4
3–6 months	16.0	19.6	20.6	24.7	12.8	18.1	18.6	17.4	19.4	16.4	22.5	19.5
7–11 months	7.7	15.5	10.5	13.2	8.3	11.4	15.0	11.7	9.7	12.1	16.4	12.4
1–2 years	16.7	16.2	14.0	15.8	10.9	11.4	15.7	17.0	21.6	20.9	21.8	17.1
Over 2 years	12.8	13.5	18.9	12.8	5.8	6.7	8.6	18.6	13.4	15.5	17.8	14.1
Not applicable (employed)	25.0	12.8	11.4	4.6	42.3	23.8	19.3	11.3	8.2	6.5	1.7	12.0
Missing	1.3	4.1	6.6	3.0	3.2	1.9	2.9	5.3	4.5	9.0	3.4	4.5
Length of current or last employment (%)												
Under 3 months	32.7	27.7	19.7	32.0	34.6	36.2	20.0	26.3	28.4	24.9	23.8	27.4
3–6 months	21.8	21.6	18.9	21.9	12.2	24.8	22.1	27.5	23.1	19.2	24.2	21.6
7–11 months	9.6	8.1	8.8	8.7	5.1	8.6	6.4	11.3	9.7	8.8	12.8	9.2
1–2 years	10.3	12.8	10.1	13.9	14.7	7.6	12.9	12.1	11.2	11.9	12.8	12.2
Over 2 years	17.3	19.6	17.5	13.7	20.5	16.2	16.4	8.5	14.2	15.0	14.4	15.1
Not applicable (never employed)	1.3	0.0	0.9	1.1	0.0	0.0	0.7	4.9	1.5	0.8	1.3	1.3
Missing	7.1	10.1	24.1	8.7	12.8	6.7	21.4	9.3	11.9	19.5	10.7	13.1
Number of employers in last 12 months (%)												
0	29.5	35.8	37.7	31.5	22.4	19.0	22.9	38.5	36.6	41.8	43.3	34.6
1	36.5	37.8	41.2	34.9	34.6	36.2	38.6	37.7	29.1	32.5	24.8	34.4
2	23.7	14.2	14.0	17.8	20.5	22.9	20.7	17.0	13.4	16.7	20.1	18.0
3	5.8	6.1	3.1	9.1	9.0	11.4	11.4	4.0	10.4	5.1	8.1	7.2
4	3.8	4.1	2.6	6.6	10.9	7.6	5.7	2.4	10.4	3.7	3.4	5.1

(continued)

TABLE 3.1 (continued)

Characteristic	Alabama	Florida	Massa-chusetts	Michigan	Minnesota Anoka	Minnesota Dakota	Missouri	New Jersey	Ohio Butler	Ohio Mont.	Tennessee	All Sites
Months of full-time work in last 12 months (%)												
0	50.6	52.0	51.8	45.9	39.7	36.2	40.0	48.6	42.5	61.0	53.0	49.2
1	5.1	4.7	4.4	6.2	5.1	3.8	4.3	7.3	5.2	4.5	4.4	5.2
2	5.8	7.4	4.4	5.3	5.8	7.6	7.1	5.3	6.0	4.0	3.0	5.2
3	5.8	4.7	7.0	5.5	8.3	6.7	3.6	6.9	5.2	5.6	10.4	6.5
4-6	19.9	16.9	14.5	17.4	18.6	23.8	15.0	13.8	23.1	11.9	14.1	16.2
7-9	7.1	6.8	7.9	10.7	13.5	12.4	14.3	10.9	9.7	7.3	10.7	9.9
10-12	5.8	7.4	10.1	9.1	9.0	9.5	15.0	7.3	8.2	5.6	4.4	7.9
Months at longest job in last 12 months (%)												
0	30.1	38.5	42.1	32.9	23.1	19.0	25.7	39.7	38.8	43.5	41.9	36.0
1	9.0	5.4	3.1	8.2	7.1	7.6	1.4	6.5	5.2	8.2	5.0	6.4
2	8.3	8.8	6.6	10.0	9.0	8.6	7.9	6.5	6.0	6.8	5.4	7.6
3	7.1	5.4	7.5	7.8	8.3	11.4	6.4	8.1	9.7	6.5	13.4	8.3
4-6	25.0	23.0	18.9	20.3	21.8	30.5	23.6	18.6	24.6	17.2	19.8	20.9
7-9	6.4	6.1	6.6	10.7	11.5	10.5	15.0	10.1	6.7	8.5	8.7	9.2
10-12	12.8	9.5	12.7	9.8	14.1	9.5	19.3	10.1	9.0	7.9	5.0	10.2
Hourly wage at most recent job (%)												
Less than $5	43.6	29.7	13.6	29.5	10.9	7.6	38.6	17.4	26.9	42.4	43.6	29.5
$5 - $6.99	32.1	40.5	36.0	47.0	39.7	42.9	37.9	48.2	38.1	30.5	39.9	39.7
$7 - $9.99	9.6	17.6	21.5	15.3	25.6	24.8	10.7	19.4	18.7	11.9	7.4	15.6
$10 - $14.99	6.4	9.5	11.4	2.7	14.1	17.1	2.1	5.7	6.7	5.9	2.7	6.5
$15 - $19.99	1.3	0.7	3.5	0.7	3.2	2.9	1.4	2.0	3.7	1.4	0.3	1.7
$20 or more	0.0	0.0	0.9	0.0	0.0	1.9	0.0	0.8	0.0	0.3	0.0	0.3
Average hourly wage at most recent job ($)	5.47	6.21	7.57	5.61	7.19	7.80	5.35	6.32	6.44	5.74	5.21	6.09

(continued)

TABLE 3.1 (continued)

Characteristic	Alabama	Florida	Massa-chusetts	Michigan	Minnesota		Missouri	New Jersey	Ohio		Tennessee	All Sites
					Anoka	Dakota			Butler	Mont.		
Education and training												
Participated in skills training in last 12 months (%)	10.3	6.1	7.9	8.9	16.0	5.7	13.6	9.3	6.7	7.6	3.4	8.4
Currently enrolled in skills training (%)	3.2	3.4	2.2	2.7	8.3	1.0	5.7	4.9	4.5	4.0	1.3	3.5
Highest grade completed in school (%)												
1-5	0.0	0.7	3.1	0.7	0.6	0.0	0.7	0.4	1.5	0.8	0.0	0.8
6-8	5.1	4.7	11.8	4.3	3.2	1.0	0.0	4.9	2.2	4.2	5.4	4.7
9	4.5	2.7	9.6	7.3	10.9	6.7	7.9	10.9	11.9	6.2	5.0	7.5
10	16.7	12.8	20.2	16.7	17.3	14.3	20.7	18.6	21.6	15.3	11.1	16.5
11	26.3	19.6	16.2	22.6	23.1	21.0	27.1	31.2	22.4	24.3	32.9	24.7
12	36.5	48.0	31.6	43.6	30.8	43.8	33.6	30.4	38.8	39.3	36.9	37.8
College/post-secondary or higher	10.9	10.1	7.0	4.3	14.1	12.4	9.3	2.0	0.0	9.3	8.7	7.4
Highest diploma or degree achieved (%)												
GED	7.1	5.4	16.2	12.1	21.2	25.7	15.0	8.1	10.4	11.6	5.7	11.7
High school diploma	39.1	52.0	29.4	39.5	36.5	40.0	31.4	32.0	36.6	42.7	42.3	38.5
Associate's degree	3.8	2.0	2.2	2.1	7.1	5.7	2.1	0.4	0.7	0.3	1.3	2.1
4-year degree or higher	1.3	2.0	0.9	0.0	1.3	1.9	1.4	0.0	0.0	1.1	0.3	0.7
None	48.7	37.8	49.6	45.9	34.0	25.7	50.0	57.5	52.2	43.8	50.0	46.3
Sample size	156	148	228	438	156	105	140	247	134	354	298	2,404

SOURCE: MDRC calculations from Background Information Form.

NOTES: Includes noncustodial parents referred to Parents' Fair Share through February 28, 1993.
Distributions may not add up to 100.0 percent because of rounding or missing items.

sites, it seems clear that the proportion of African-American noncustodial parents in the PFS sample was considerably higher than the proportion of African-American custodial parents in some of the county AFDC populations. For example, while about half of the AFDC recipients entering the research sample for a federally funded evaluation of Kent County, Michigan's, JOBS program are white,[26] the PFS population in the county is only about 30 percent white. However, these figures, by themselves, do not provide evidence of racial bias. As described earlier, the nature of the PFS population is shaped by the long, complex "pipeline" leading to the PFS referral. For example, there may be racial differences in the proportion of children who have paternity and support orders established. Similarly, it may be that white noncustodial parents are more likely to be employed and thus better able to pay child support (or to find a job quickly to avoid a PFS referral). Further study is needed to better understand the nature of the "pipeline" leading to PFS.

The majority of noncustodial parents reported having either one or two children at the point of referral; about one in five had four or more children. The vast majority (86 percent) reported having had children with either one or two partners. Like the NLSY information presented earlier, these data do not appear to support the popular stereotype of AFDC noncustodial parents as men who have fathered large numbers of children with many partners. However, it is important to note that, given the time and place where the BIF was usually completed (in court, just after a hearing), noncustodial parents may have had an incentive to underreport the number of children they had fathered if paternity had not been established for one or more of them (which is quite likely, given the large number of children receiving welfare for whom paternity has not been established). In addition, as discussed earlier, the PFS population represents only a subset of AFDC noncustodial parents.

B. Employment and Education Histories

Although virtually all of the PFS noncustodial parents had some work experience, most reported very little recent employment. Nearly two-thirds said they had worked full time for three months or less in the past year, and one in seven said they had been unemployed for more than two years. About 70 percent reported that their most recent hourly wage was less than $7 per hour.

On the other hand, there appears to have been a group of noncustodial parents with somewhat more extensive work histories. About one-third said they were either employed at the point of the

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[25](...continued)
for child-support-related reasons. They maintain that members of minority groups are more likely to be picked up in this way.

[26]Unpublished MDRC data.

interview[27] or had been out of work less than three months. About one-fourth said that their current or most recent job had lasted at least one year, and about one-fourth said that their current or most recent job paid $7 or more per hour.

In assessing these data, it is critical to note that, in most sites, noncustodial parents had a strong incentive to underreport their recent work experience at the point when the BIF was completed, since most had been called in to court to explain why they had not been paying child support. If a noncustodial parent fails to pay support when he has income available, he can be found in contempt of court and jailed. Nevertheless, peer support facilitators reported that the vast majority of participants they encountered – particularly those who were less than 30 years old – had very limited work histories.[28]

In any case, many of the noncustodial parents faced educational deficits that probably created barriers to employment; only a little more than half had earned a high school diploma or GED. This figure ranged from a low of 40 percent in New Jersey to a high of 66 percent in Dakota County, Minnesota.[29] About 30 percent of the parents reported that their highest grade completed in school was grade 10 or below. Moreover, data reported by sites suggest that many noncustodial parents were functioning below their reported grade level. For example, the Alabama site found that 50 of 80 enrollees who entered PFS during one period read below the fifth-grade level. Similarly, in Montgomery County, Ohio, nearly 60 percent of the first 220 PFS enrollees scored at the ninth-grade level or below on a standardized vocabulary test, and nearly two-thirds scored at or below the sixth-grade level in math. Another important barrier to employment, discussed further below, is previous involvement with the criminal justice system; large proportions of the noncustodial parents reported previous arrests and/or convictions. Finally, fewer than 10 percent of the parents had been enrolled in a training program within the prior year.

There were important racial differences in many of the characteristics just described. Overall, the African-American noncustodial parents were younger and reported less recent work experience,

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[27]The PFS eligibility criteria allowed sites to enroll noncustodial parents who were unemployed or underemployed.

[28]Peer support facilitators, however, met only a subset of the PFS population; those with stronger employment backgrounds may have been more likely to find jobs on their own and fail to show up for program activities.

[29]There was also considerable variation across sites in the breakdown of high school diplomas versus GEDs. The proportion with a high school diploma ranged from 29 percent in Massachusetts to more than 50 percent in Florida, while the proportion with a GED ranged from 5 percent in Florida to more than 25 percent in Dakota County, Minnesota.

although they were also more likely to have a high school diploma. This group was also less likely to have been married and had, on average, more children with more partners.

C. Living Situations and Income Sources

Table 3.2 shows the responses to some key items from the Enrollment Form, which was completed by a subset of the noncustodial parents who completed the BIF (in most sites, those who showed up for a PFS orientation).[30] As the table shows, less than 5 percent of PFS enrollees reported that they were living alone when they completed the form; this is not surprising given their current economic situations. Like the NLSY fathers described earlier, the largest fraction of PFS noncustodial parents, more than 40 percent, reported living with their mothers. Sizable percentages also reported living with their siblings (32 percent), spouses or partners (21 percent), or fathers (16 percent). Only about 14 percent reported living with any of their own children.

However, these figures mask a set of extremely complex and dynamic living arrangements, often involving a variety of extended family members and spanning several generations. Less than half of the noncustodial parents reported living in "traditional" households such as those including their parents and siblings only or their spouse/partner and children only. These patterns appear to be consistent with the ethnographic research described earlier.

In interviews with staff and participants, it also became clear that many of the noncustodial parents did not have (or were reluctant to report) a consistent address. One peer support facilitator noted that participants often listed their mothers' house as their mailing address, but later admitted in peer support sessions that they in fact usually stayed with a girlfriend who was receiving AFDC;[31] this was true for several of the interviewees. About 4 percent of the enrollees reported that they had slept in a shelter, in the street, or in a public place (such as a bus station) within the prior 30 days.

As noted earlier, the vast majority of noncustodial parents reported being unemployed at the

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[30]These figures include the 2,205 noncustodial parents who completed the BIF by February 28, 1993, and also completed an Enrollment Form at any point; this is about 92 percent of the individuals whose BIF characteristics were reported in Table 3.1. The BIF and Enrollment Form samples were nearly identical in sites such as Alabama and Michigan, where the forms were completed at the same point. The largest discrepancies were in Ohio and Tennessee, where the forms were completed at different points and substantial numbers of noncustodial parents who were referred to PFS never showed up for orientation.

[31]In many cases, these living arrangements were not openly discussed because the noncustodial parent's girlfriend was receiving AFDC and his presence in her household had not been reported to the welfare agency. This may help to explain why the fraction of interviewees who reported living with one or more of their children was higher than the corresponding figure for all BIF respondents; noncustodial parents may have been more willing to discuss these arrangements openly in a confidential interview.

TABLE 3.2

SELECTED CHARACTERISTICS OF NONCUSTODIAL PARENTS REFERRED TO PARENTS' FAIR SHARE PILOT PROGRAMS WHO COMPLETED AN ENROLLMENT FORM

Characteristic	Percent
Household information	
Lives alone	4.1
Lives with	
Mother	43.9
Father	16.0
Foster parent(s)	0.6
Siblings	31.8
Spouse/partner	20.6
Own children	13.9
Children of spouse/partner	10.2
Other children	16.0
Other relatives	12.1
Friends	7.8
Others	6.8
In past 30 days, number of nights stayed somewhere other than usual residence (a)	
None	60.5
1–8	23.8
9 or more	15.5
Poverty indicators	
In past three months, ever	
Needed food but could not afford to buy it	38.4
Could not afford rent or mortgage	29.6
Had gas or electricity turned off for nonpayment	11.2
In past 30 days, ever slept in street, public place, or shelter	3.6
Owns a car	36.8
Arrest and conviction record	
Since 16th birthday, ever	
Arrested	74.5
Convicted	45.8
Sample size	2,205

SOURCE: MDRC calculations from PFS Enrollment Form.

NOTES: Includes noncustodial parents referred to Parents' Fair Share through February 28, 1993, who completed an Enrollment Form (91.7 percent of all those referred).

Distributions may add to more than 100.0 percent because respondents may be in more than one category.

(a) Distribution does not add up to 100.0 percent because of rounding.

112

point they were referred to PFS. When asked, in interviews, how they supported themselves, many of the noncustodial parents described combining income from a variety of sources. Many were supported, at least in part, by their mothers, other relatives, girlfriends, or wives. Other income sources that were mentioned included "odd jobs," usually performed for cash (for example, yardwork, car repairs, or painting); part-time jobs (which the men sometimes did not view as "real" work); Unemployment Insurance payments; and welfare payments (paid to the noncustodial parents directly or, more commonly, to the women with whom they frequently stayed). None of those interviewed said that they had recently engaged in illegal activities such as selling drugs, although many said that some other members of their peer support group did so, or implied they had done so themselves at some point in the past. Several referred to activities such as "hustling" or "wheeling and dealing" that might or might not have been illegal. On the Enrollment Form, three-fourths of the noncustodial parents reported that they had been arrested at least once since their sixteenth birthday; 46 percent said they had been convicted.[32]

Whatever their income sources, many of the noncustodial parents said they were having trouble meeting their basic needs. Nearly 40 percent said there had been a time during the prior three months when they needed food but could not afford to get it. Nearly one-third said they had been unable to pay the rent at some point during that period.

D. CSE Status

As expected, data from the CSE system indicate that relatively few of the noncustodial parents who were referred to PFS paid child support in the months immediately preceding the referral. In fact, only about 23 percent of the noncustodial parents themselves reported paying any formal support in the preceding 90 days. Given their reports about their recent income, it is perhaps not surprising that nearly half of the noncustodial parents had accumulated child support arrearages of $2,500 or more at the point they were referred to PFS. This information is discussed further in Chapter 6.

III. Relationships and Attitudes

Tables 3.3 and 3.4 include information about the noncustodial parents' relationships with their children and ex-partners and their attitudes toward work and child support, as reported on the Enrollment Form.

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[32]It is not clear what proportion of these arrests were related to child support.

A. Relationships with Children and Custodial Parents

In order to characterize the noncustodial parents' relationships with their children and ex-partners at the point of PFS enrollment, the Enrollment Form asked each parent to identify the youngest child for whom he was behind on support payments. A series of questions was then asked to describe the noncustodial parent's relationship with this "target" child and the child's other parent.[33] The responses are summarized in Table 3.3.

1. Relationships with Custodial Parents. Less than half of the PFS enrollees reported that they were living with the target child's other parent when the child was conceived (only 15 percent were married and living together). Nearly all of the others reported that they and the custodial parent were unmarried and living apart at that point. However, of this latter group, most said they were in a steady relationship with the other parent. Thus, overall, about 18 percent of the noncustodial parents said that, at the time the target child was conceived, they were unmarried, living apart from the target child's other parent, and had no steady relationship with that parent (this figure is 24 percent among noncustodial parents 18 to 21 years old). Although certainly not insignificant, this figure appears to conflict with a popular stereotype that suggests that a large proportion of AFDC children are conceived through casual, short-term relationships – though, once again, the PFS population may be atypical.

More than half of those who completed the Enrollment Form described their recent relationship with the target child's custodial parent as "very friendly" or "somewhat friendly." Another 21 percent said the relationship was "neutral," and about 14 percent said they had had no relationship. Only about 13 percent characterized the relationship as "somewhat hostile" or "very hostile." Interestingly, the proportion describing the current relationship as friendly was higher among those who had lived apart but had had a steady relationship at conception than among those who had lived together. As might be expected, the proportion with no relationship was highest (about 28 percent) among those who had been living apart from the custodial parent and had had no steady relationship at conception.

Although relatively few noncustodial parents described their overall relationship as hostile, many reported conflict with the custodial parent around specific subjects. The most common areas of conflict were "how the child is raised" (33 percent reported some or a great deal of conflict), "how

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[33]It was not practical to ask the noncustodial parents to describe their relationship with each of their children. Thus, a decision was made to identify and focus on one "target child" whose child support case might have triggered the referral to PFS (because the noncustodial parent reported being behind in support for this child). However, the parent's relationship with the target child may not have been typical of his relationships with his children. Other research shows that relationships between noncustodial parents and their children tend to be closest when the children are young.

TABLE 3.3

RELATIONSHIPS WITH CHILDREN AND CUSTODIAL PARENTS AMONG NONCUSTODIAL PARENTS REFERRED TO PARENTS' FAIR SHARE PILOT PROGRAMS WHO COMPLETED AN ENROLLMENT FORM

Measure	Percent
Information on target child (a)	
Age	
Less than 1 year	15.9
1–2 years	23.0
3–4 years	19.5
5–9 years	26.1
10 years or older	15.3
Child currently lives with	
Other parent	90.1
Grandparent	4.7
Other relative	1.2
Foster parents	0.5
Other	2.2
Child receiving welfare continuously since birth	
Definitely yes	50.4
Probably yes	13.1
Probably not	3.2
Definitely not	14.0
Don't know	8.9
Relationship of parents at target child's conception (a)	
Parents were	
Married, living together	15.1
Married, living apart	2.7
Unmarried, living together	28.1
Unmarried, living apart	50.7
Steady relationship	33.1
No steady relationship	17.7
Noncustodial parent's contact with target child (a)	
Months since last contact	
Less than 1 month	61.7
1–2 months	17.8
3–4 months	3.4
5–12 months	6.2
More than 12 months	4.8

(continued)

TABLE 3.3 (continued)

Measure	Percent
Frequency of contact in past 12 months	
None	7.3
About once	4.1
Several times	11.5
One to three times a month	18.0
About once a week	13.1
Several times a week	41.3
Frequency of telephone conversations or letters in past 12 months	
None	38.5
About once	2.0
Several times	7.2
One to three times a month	10.2
About once a week	11.8
Several times a week	28.3
Influence over major decisions in target child's life in past 12 months	
None	43.4
Some	30.1
A great deal	25.2
Noncustodial parent's perceptions about current relationship with target child's other parent (a)	
Nature of relationship	
Very friendly	32.0
Somewhat friendly	19.4
Neutral	21.2
Somewhat hostile	7.7
Very hostile	4.9
No relationship	13.5
Other parent deceased	0.2
Sources of some or a great deal of conflict	
Who has custody of child	17.3
Where child lives	17.3
Who lives in child's household	19.0
How child is raised	33.1
How noncustodial parent spends money on child	24.8
How child support payments are spent	17.9
How often noncustodial parent makes child support payments	19.6
Amount of child support payments	16.2
How often noncustodial parent visits with child	26.8
What noncustodial parent does when he or she visits with child	15.5

(continued)

TABLE 3.3 (continued)

Measure	Percent
Other major dissatisfactions	
Selected situations about which noncustodial parent is somewhat or very dissatisfied	
Where target child lives	27.5
His or her contact with target child	29.5
His or her contribution to target child's support	47.9
Sample size	2,205

SOURCE: MDRC calculations from PFS Enrollment Form.

NOTES: Includes noncustodial parents referred to Parents' Fair Share through February 28, 1993, who completed an Enrollment Form (91.7 percent of all those referred).

Distributions may not add up to 100.0 percent because of rounding or missing items.

(a) "Target child" refers to the youngest child for whom the noncustodial parent reported being behind on support payments.

often the noncustodial parent visits the child" (27 percent), and "how the noncustodial parent spends money on the child" (25 percent).[34] Somewhat less conflict was reported over custody, where the child lived, who else lived with the child, how child support was spent, and what the non-custodial parent did during his visits with the child. Nearly 30 percent of enrollees reported that they were somewhat dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with their contact with the target child or where the child lived. Almost half said they were not satisfied with their contribution to the child's support, although it was not clear whether they thought they were paying too much or too little. These reports suggest that conflict may be more prevalent among this population than among the broader NSFH sample described earlier. This may be related to the fact that the PFS fathers appear to have had more frequent contact with their children (discussed below).[35]

Discussions with peer support facilitators (and analysis of their feedback forms) suggest that levels of conflict and dissatisfaction were even higher than those reported on the Enrollment Form.[36] Facilitators reported that a substantial fraction of peer support participants felt they were denied access to their children, and that many claimed that custodial parents were doing a poor job of raising the children. Many were also unhappy that the custodial parent had a new partner who was playing an important role in the children's lives. Participants often expressed extremely negative views of the mothers of their children (and, by extension, of women in general) during early peer support sessions. Several of the noncustodial parents who were interviewed expressed intense bitterness or hostility about

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[34]In some cases, the nature of these conflicts is unclear. For example, conflict over "how often the noncustodial parent visited" could have indicated that he wanted to visit more and was not permitted to do so, or that the custodial parent wanted him to visit more than he did.

[35]The link between visitation and conflict represents an interesting pattern. In general, levels of conflict appear to have increased as the frequency of visitation rose. For example, the fraction of noncustodial parents reporting some or a great deal of conflict over how the target child was being raised increased from less than 16 percent among those who reported no visits in the past year to nearly 42 percent among those who reported having visited once a week. It seems plausible that increased contact between the noncustodial parent and the custodial family stimulated greater conflict. However, the proportion reporting conflict dropped, to 31 percent, among noncustodial parents who visited several times a week. This pattern was evident for almost all types of conflict. It may be that noncustodial parents in this latter group were either officially or unofficially living with the custodial parent and child much of the time; these individuals may not have been noncustodial parents in the strict sense of the word.

[36]Several factors may explain this discrepancy. For example, enrollees may have been reluctant to report honestly when they completed the Enrollment Form, or may have begun to see these issues differently after spending time in peer support. Alternatively, facilitators may have had trouble estimating what fraction of participants were experiencing a specific problem. Finally, it is important to reiterate that the facilitators came in contact with only a subset of those who completed the Enrollment Form, and that the form referred to only one target child.

the custodial parent's treatment of them or the children. Typical of this group was one interviewee, who said:

> I have not had visitation rights. I have seen the child on a regular basis but not the formal visitation that I'm supposed to be allotted for the better part of nine years now. And, in the meantime, the boyfriend or husband of the week [lived with the child and] the mother continuously told the child: "This is your father now. You don't call him [the interviewee] dad." I'm not referred to by my own son as dad . . . and that does hurt. [The custodial parent said] "You don't have anything to do with that man [the interviewee]. He may be your father biologically, but he is not your father."

Of course, there are two sides to every issue, and this study did not speak to custodial parents.[37] Moreover, as one interviewee pointed out, the roots of this kind of conflict and intense anger may be traced to the noncustodial parent's pain and frustration over a failed relationship, especially if the custodial parent now had a new partner. As he put it: "A lot of us didn't want to admit it, but the separation of the man and the baby's mother, and another man taking care of the father's child, I know that hurt."

Emotions such as these are certainly understandable and do not seem to be unique to low-income or AFDC noncustodial parents.

2. <u>Parenting Activities</u>. Most of the PFS noncustodial parents reported having had fairly regular contact with the target child. Overall, about three-fourths reported that they had seen the child at least one to three times a month during the previous year, and more than 40 percent said they had seen the child several times a week. Only about 7 percent said they had not seen the child at all in the past year. The noncustodial parents also reported substantial involvement in childrearing: 55 percent reported on the Enrollment Form that they had some or a great deal of influence over key decisions regarding their child's upbringing, such as his or her education, religion, and health care. Peer group facilitators and other staff report that some noncustodial parents actually became custodial parents, either temporarily or permanently assuming responsibility for some or all of their children. In some cases, these responsibilities were shared with the custodial parent, while in others the noncustodial parent was forced to handle them alone because the custodial parent was incapable or unwilling to do so. Some of these arrangements may have been informal, and may not have been reported to the CSE or welfare agency.

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[37]The preliminary research design for Phase II of the demonstration includes a survey of custodial parents. For a discussion of custodial parents' views of child support, see Furstenberg, Sherwood, and Sullivan, 1992.

If accurate, these data suggest that PFS participants tended to see their children much more frequently than do typical noncustodial parents. As noted earlier, the NSFH found that only 15 percent of children visited several times a week with their noncustodial father. Of course, direct comparisons may be problematic for several reasons. For example, the PFS figures are reported by noncustodial parents, whereas the NSFH figures are reported by custodial parents.[38] In addition, the PFS data refer only to one child, who is often the noncustodial parent's youngest child.

Finally, although many of the noncustodial parents reported frequent contact with their children, peer group facilitators suggested that many did not fully appreciate or understand a father's role. For example, staff reported that the time noncustodial parents spent with their children during visits was often not "productive" or "quality" time. They noted that participants often left their children in the care of a female relative or girlfriend while they went out with friends, or that the noncustodial parents tended to spend time with the child and other people, rather than with the child alone.

In early peer support sessions, many noncustodial parents expressed narrow views of fatherhood, defining it primarily as giving gifts or cash payments to the children or the custodial parent. Some peer support facilitators attributed this to the fact that most participants lacked positive, male parental role models. As noted in Table 3.1, more than half of those who completed the BIF (59 percent in the case of African-Americans) reported that they had not lived with their own father at age 14.[39] In peer support sessions, many participants who had lived with their fathers said they rarely saw them because their fathers worked long hours or were frequently not present for other reasons. In one of the sites, two facilitators both estimated that over half of all participants felt "hatred or anger" toward their own fathers. They suggested that this left many embittered and confused about fatherhood, but also motivated them to want to do a better job with their own children. As discussed in Chapter 5, this topic often generated intense and emotional discussions during peer support sessions.

In any case, the PFS data appear to be consistent with several of the findings from other research that were reported on earlier. For example, it seems clear that visitation patterns were closely linked to the age of the target child: Almost 66 percent of noncustodial parents with a target child under one year old reported visiting several times a week, compared to only 26 percent of those with a target child over 7 years old. Visitation rates were substantially higher among African-American noncustodial parents than among non-Hispanic whites, and were also higher among younger parents

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[38]As noted earlier, the Survey of Absent Parents, which interviewed matched pairs of custodial and noncustodial parents, found that custodial parents reported less frequent visitation than noncustodial parents.

[39]Some may have lived with a stepfather or another father-like figure.

than among those over 30 years old (noncustodial parent age was probably closely linked to the age of the target child). As might be expected, visitation rates were lower in situations where the custodial and noncustodial parent had been living apart and had no steady relationship at the point of conception. Interestingly, among those with steady relationships at conception, frequent visitation was more common when the parents had been living apart than when they had been living together (either married or cohabitating).

The data also appear to confirm the link between the various components of fatherhood: 45 percent of those who visited several times a week reported having a great deal of influence over key childrearing decisions. This figure was 8 percent among noncustodial parents who visited only several times a year. Although few paid child support, 79 percent of those who visited several times a week reported having bought a gift for their child within the previous 90 days, compared to 40 percent of those who visited several times a year.

B. Attitudes About Child Support

Table 3.4 reports the enrollees' views, expressed on the Enrollment Form, about whether a series of commonly voiced factors were "good reasons" for not paying child support. The table shows that the vast majority of noncustodial parents saw unemployment as a good reason for not paying support. No other reason was considered "good" by a majority of the fathers. Few noncustodial parents saw "other parent does not need the money" "other parent has another partner" or "does not accept responsibility for the children" as good reasons. Noncustodial parents who had been living apart from the custodial parent at the time of conception and had no steady relationship were somewhat more likely to characterize the stated explanations as good reasons for not paying.

These figures suggest that most noncustodial parents did not deny their financial responsibility for their children. However, both CSE records and the reports of participants and staff suggest that these feelings did not necessarily translate into formal child support payments. Several factors appear to explain this discrepancy.[40]

First, many noncustodial parents said they lacked the income to pay support regularly. The data on their employment histories and living conditions appear to confirm this, although, as noted earlier, there are reasons to question the accuracy of some of those reports. Other parents claimed to agree with the notion of support in theory, but admitted that their actual payment patterns were

[40]See Furstenberg, Sherwood, and Sullivan, 1992, for a more complete discussion of noncustodial parents' attitudes toward child support.

TABLE 3.4

CHILD SUPPORT ATTITUDES AND ASSISTANCE AND WORK ATTITUDES OF NONCUSTODIAL PARENTS REFERRED TO PARENTS' FAIR SHARE PILOT PROGRAMS WHO COMPLETED AN ENROLLMENT FORM

Measure	Percent
Child support attitudes	
Perceptions about whether various factors are good reasons for not paying child support (percent saying that the reason is a good one)	
Noncustodial parent is unemployed	85.4
Child support order is too high	46.8
Noncustodial parent has another family to support	27.0
There are disagreements about visitation	35.3
There are disagreements about how the money is spent	43.7
Child support money goes to welfare or the state, not the children	31.9
Other parent does not need the money	15.2
Other parent has another partner	11.0
Noncustodial parent does not believe that the children are really theirs	43.0
Noncustodial parent does not accept responsibility for the children	12.2
Other	3.4
Child support and other assistance	
In past 90 days, noncustodial parent provided assistance to target child or household by (a)	
Paying support to a court or government agency	23.5
Giving money directly to the child or his or her parent	50.4
Making car payments, purchasing a car, or loaning his car	5.6
Paying medical bills	4.4
Making mortage or rent payments	4.5
Helping with repairs around the house	20.6
Buying clothes, furniture, or other major items	55.7
Buying diapers	26.5
Buying or giving presents to the child	60.0
Babysitting (not including scheduled visitation)	43.9
Anything else not listed	5.6

(continued)

TABLE 3.4 (continued)

Measure	Percent
Work and training attitudes	
Agree or agree a lot with following statements	
I could get a job if I got help looking for a job	88.0
Going to a training program would help me get a good job	91.1
Going to a school that teaches basic reading and math would help me get a good job	57.5
I have trouble holding down a steady job	25.5
Hard work makes you a better person	82.2
When I leave a job, it is usually my choice to do so	59.4
Most of the time hard work does not pay off	25.2
To me work is nothing more than a way to make a living	47.2
I do not care what type of job I do, as long as I have a job	39.3
Sample size	2,205

SOURCE: MDRC calculations from PFS Enrollment Form.

NOTES: Includes noncustodial parents referred to Parents' Fair Share through February 28, 1993, who completed an Enrollment Form (91.7 percent of all those referred).

Distributions may not add up to 100.0 percent because of rounding or missing items.

(a) "Target child" refers to the youngest child for whom the noncustodial parent reported being behind on support payments.

affected by their relationship with the custodial parent. Particularly when this relationship was strained, noncustodial parents may have had difficulty connecting the notion of child support with their children's well-being; they focused instead on their own conflicts with the custodial parent. Some reacted by refusing to pay support at all, for example, because there was a dispute with the custodial parent over visitation. "I won't pay because she won't let me visit" was a common refrain.

Second, even when the noncustodial parents did provide support, discussions with both participants and staff revealed the same dichotomy between formal and informal support described in other studies. It is clear that for many of the PFS parents, the notion of assuming responsibility for one's children was not necessarily consistent with paying child support through the formal system. In fact, in some cases the two may have been in direct conflict. On the Enrollment Form, nearly 60 percent of noncustodial parents said they had bought presents, clothing, or other items for the target child within the past 90 days. Half said they had given money directly to the child or his or her other parent. However, only 24 percent reported paying any child support to a court or government agency. Presumably, little if any of the informal child support was counted by the CSE agency. (Of course, it is difficult to determine how regularly these noncustodial parents provided informal support, or whether custodial parents would have agreed with their reports.)

One factor that led many PFS noncustodial parents to prefer informal payments was their mistrust of custodial parents and their desire to control the use of child support payments (such feelings are probably not unique to this group of noncustodial parents). Some were willing to provide support, at least sporadically, but insisted on directly purchasing items such as shoes, clothing, or toys, rather than providing cash, because this made them feel certain that the support was going directly to the child. These parents resented their lack of control over how resources were spent and questioned whether they were used to benefit the child. They often had trouble seeing or accepting that the child was part of a household budget that also supported the mother, and were frustrated because the CSE agency would not credit them for their direct or in-kind contributions. One of the interviewees, a 45-year-old noncustodial parent, described the views of many of his younger companions in peer support:

> [The younger fathers] were griping that they pay child support and the mother is taking the money and buying this and buying that and not using it for the child. Well, I went through that with my 23-year-old when he was about six or seven after I got a divorce. And I said the same thing. Back then, the court system told me that the mother has been taking care of that child seven days a week and the money I was paying her for support was like a reimbursement for what she had already spent – and it made sense. So I quit fighting the system as far as child support because that was a responsibility that I had and

that's the same thing that I try to show fathers that I talk to now that's griping about them having to pay child support.

For other parents, hostility to the CSE system itself led to strong resistance. Complaints about the system were numerous and varied. Perhaps the most common charge was that the system is "one-sided" or "slanted toward women," in large part because it does not force custodial parents to work or account for how child support money is spent. Another common perception was that the system is unfair, particularly to low-income noncustodial parents, because it does not sufficiently consider the absent parent's economic circumstances in setting and enforcing support obligations. These statements by interviewees effectively capture some of these sentiments:

> If it's going to be pretty much: Bring the fathers in [to court], then they [the court] should listen to what the fathers say and understand the father's situation. And also you run into the problem of the mothers . . . where the fathers aren't paying because of difficulties with the mothers, but the mothers can do what they want to . . . Like in my situation, my children's mother, she was a crack addict, but yet the court didn't want to hear that . . . The only thing the court wanted to hear was: Was I paying my money? . . . It's a two-way street . . . [They] should have a surprise visit on the mothers to see how the money is being spent.

> They ordered me to pay x amount of dollars a month and I never paid anything because, you know, a minimum wage job, you got rent, you got utilities, you got food, you got other expenses like gas and clothing, and trying to take care of this other child. You know, it was like: What comes first? I can't cut any more . . . I can't afford that.

Several of the interviewees claimed they had never been informed they could request a modification of their support order and said they had accumulated large arrearages during periods when they were unemployed.

For a few of the interviewees, the CSE system's unfairness was directly related to the state's efforts to collect reimbursement for welfare expenditures. These parents either did not see or did not accept the link between their lack of support payments and their children's welfare receipt (or did not find it objectionable that their children were receiving public assistance). They felt that they and the custodial parents had worked out acceptable child support arrangements – typically involving direct cash payments – that were disrupted by what they perceived to be pointless interference by the government that actually reduced the resources available to their children. As one noncustodial parent put it:

> Welfare really makes a big difference . . . My children's mothers that were working never went to court about child support . . . But my children's mothers that's on public assistance, then we're in court all the time . . . It's all about politics . . . if the

> government feels like they're taking care of your family, then they feel like they should get their money back one way or another. Whereas if you are self-supporting . . . they don't care what you do. That's why these lawyers and doctors get off . . . Those are the true "deadbeat dads." If you're making $100,000 a year, you can't tell me that if you're not paying child support, you're not a deadbeat. These fathers that are unemployed, going to work, or have drug problems or have no place to stay and they're still trying to do the best they can to take care of their children even though they can't . . . they're not deadbeats because they're at least trying.

It is also clear that many of the noncustodial parents were confused about the workings of the CSE system. Many made inaccurate statements about the system during interviews or said they did not understand why certain events had occurred. One frustrated noncustodial parent said: "There is no one person on the face of the earth that can explain the whole child support system."

Overall, these data demonstrate that a variety of factors in addition to lack of income affected child support payment patterns. This suggests that many PFS noncustodial parents would not have made regular formal support payments even if they had been employed and confirms the rationale for the peer support component, which was designed in part to build the parents' commitment to formal child support.

C. Values and Aspirations

Most of the noncustodial parents who were referred to PFS professed to hold mainstream values. As noted earlier, the majority of these parents did not accept the validity of several possible reasons for failing to pay child support. In addition, on the Enrollment Form, large majorities said they agreed with general statements such as "hard work makes you a better person" (see Table 3.4). Similarly, data from an early peer support exercise that asked the parents to assess what they cared about most showed that the highest-rated items were: "doing a good job raising my children," "making money," "staying out of trouble," and "getting a job I enjoy." Goals such as "being popular," "having a nice car," and "having more children" were rated much lower. On the Enrollment Form, a large majority also said they could get a good job with help or training; a smaller fraction, but still a majority, thought basic education would help them find a good job. Interestingly, only 26 percent of the noncustodial parents said they had trouble holding down a steady job.

At the same time, facilitators reported that a large proportion of noncustodial parents were depressed, angry, or despondent when they entered PFS. Many had experienced painful separations from ex-wives or girlfriends, and said they were unable to see their children regularly. As noted earlier, the vast majority reported being unemployed – or at least said they had no steady job – and

many faced legal problems and crushing debts, either for child support or for other items such as utilities, fines, or health care expenses. Given their typically narrow views of fatherhood, many felt that their lack of income and resulting inability to buy things for their children made them failures as parents.

Many of the noncustodial parents felt powerless to affect their circumstances. As noted earlier, most were convinced that the CSE system is stacked against noncustodial parents. Many of the African-American participants felt that this basic unfairness is compounded by racism that, in their view, pervades the CSE system and the labor market, creating an insurmountable barrier to economic success. This resulted in profound cynicism and a desire to remain outside the "system." One facilitator suggested that many participants had become "comfortable" with their current life-styles despite living in poverty and saw few reasons to change.

Other participants felt intense frustration over their situations and tended to be aggressive and quick to anger. One facilitator said he was "amazed" at the level of domestic violence that was discussed during peer support sessions. More than one of the interviewees said he had considered or attempted suicide in the recent past. Some facilitators contended that a substantial proportion of the participants abuse alcohol or drugs, although they differed on the extent of this problem.

D. Initial Impressions of PFS

In the Montgomery County, Ohio, and Tennessee sites, where participants were generally ordered into PFS during court hearings, many of the participants who were interviewed said they were initially angry and resentful about being required to participate in PFS and skeptical about the program's ability to help them. For some, PFS seemed to be an extension of a CSE system that they perceived to be totally unfair. Facilitators reported that many new participants thought that their ex-wife or partner was responsible for having them sent to PFS (in fact, AFDC recipients assign their rights to child support to the state, which pursues payment with or without their cooperation), and many asked, in effect: "I have to go to this program. What does *she* have to do?" One Tennessee participant said that early sessions of his peer support group focused on the question of why there were so few white noncustodial parents in PFS; he felt that African-American noncustodial parents were being singled out for enforcement action. Others simply resented being told what to do. One Ohio participant responded in a positive way: "I felt I was being pushed, just thrown into this program and whatever it takes, I gotta get through it, so I just bit the bullet and said, 'Well, I'm going to go through it.'"

Another participant was more negative, saying:

> I thought it was a waste of time at first. The people at the human services department or the courts . . . they give you the impression that you're a bad parent . . . because they said, "You're going to have to go through this program to become a better father." And I said, "Well, what makes you think I'm not a good father now? You people don't even know me, you just pulled my name out of the computer."

These negative perceptions appeared to be especially prevalent when participants said they had received only a cursory description of PFS in court and knew almost nothing about what to expect. Several said they had simply been given a time and place in court and told to show up or face a jail sentence.

In Tennessee, most of the noncustodial parents said they had heard a presentation about PFS in court, and were given a "choice" among three options: paying child support immediately, going to PFS, or going to jail. Some of the participants commented that this choice was highly constrained (since they were not capable of paying support), but others seemed to appreciate the fact that they had been allowed some discretion.

As will be discussed in Chapter 5, most of these noncustodial parents said that their attitudes about PFS quickly changed when they became involved with peer support.

IV. Conclusions

On the one hand, the PFS population can be seen as a group of fathers who live apart from their children, experiencing many of the same frustrations, conflicts, and uncertainties that commonly accompany that situation regardless of socioeconomic status. If anything, the PFS participants appeared to have closer relationships with their children, on average, than do typical noncustodial parents, although a substantial minority did not see their children regularly.

On the other hand, it is clear that PFS reached a group of men who were only marginally connected to the mainstream society. Although some of the parents – particularly the older ones – had worked steadily in the past, most had not. They lived highly unstable lives, working sporadically for cash and living with a shifting set of relatives, friends, and female partners. These men faced daunting obstacles to obtaining steady work, including poor basic skills, legal problems, and racial discrimination; many were profoundly cynical and had little desire to enter the mainstream.

Moreover, while many of the parents cared deeply about their children and saw them often, even these parents saw few reasons to pay child support through the formal CSE system; they claimed

they did provide support informally when they could afford to. Their views of fatherhood were narrow, in part because most did not grow up with their own fathers, but they very much wanted to be good fathers.

If this portrait is accurate, PFS presents a rare opportunity to engage a group of men who are rarely served by social service and job training programs. The program's challenge is to build on their strong paternal feelings to persuade them to take the steps necessary to enter and remain in the economic and social mainstream.

CHAPTER 4

PROGRAM SCALE AND PARTICIPATION PATTERNS

This chapter examines the scale of the PFS pilot programs and the rates of participation in program activities among noncustodial parents who were referred into PFS during the first seven to ten months of pilot operations. Both of these measures are important to assessing the feasibility of the PFS approach and the appropriateness of implementing a random assignment evaluation to test its impacts.

Overall, the data in this chapter suggest that most PFS sites have been able to devise systems to identify and refer large numbers of noncustodial parents for PFS services. Equally important, a large fraction of these referred parents – about two-thirds – actually participated in a PFS activity within four months of the referral. This compares favorably with participation rates measured in welfare-to-work programs for AFDC recipients, which also attempted to impose participation requirements on large numbers of individuals who may not have sought these services on their own. Finally, the data also indicate that most of the noncustodial parents who were referred to PFS but failed to participate were either referred for further enforcement action or found jobs on their own. This suggests that the sites developed relatively strong tracking and follow-up systems that allowed few parents to "slip through the cracks." All of these findings help to support the conclusion that PFS is indeed operationally feasible.

I. Program Scale

A key goal of the pilot phase was to determine whether sites could mount and operate large-scale PFS programs. Programs serving relatively large numbers of participants are more relevant to policymakers seeking national models, and provide a more demanding test of administrative linkages and systems. Moreover, large research samples are required to implement a random assignment evaluation such as the one planned for Phase II of the demonstration.

Throughout the pilot, MDRC used two broad indicators to assess the scale of the pilot programs: (1) the number of noncustodial parents "referred" to PFS,[1] and (2) the number who

[1]The number of parents referred to PFS is measured by the number who completed the BIF. As noted earlier, the BIF was usually completed just after a court hearing that resulted in a referral to PFS. However, (continued...)

"participated" in program activities. As noted earlier, during the site selection phase, MDRC stipulated that each site would be expected to build the capacity to serve at least 300 participants during the pilot phase. For this purpose, a "participant" was defined as an eligible noncustodial parent who attended at least one session of peer support *and* one session of an employment and training activity (although substantially more participation was expected). This definition was later expanded to include individuals who did not meet the definition of a participant but did find and report employment to program staff.

There was no specific target for referrals; sites were expected to refer as many noncustodial parents as necessary to obtain at least 300 participants. However, the number of referrals was an important measure of the sites' ability to identify and contact nonpaying noncustodial parents. This ability was especially important because, as described in Chapter 1, many CSE agencies did not routinely "work" the cases targeted for PFS prior to the start of the demonstration. It was expected that sites would need to identify many more than 300 nonpaying noncustodial parents in order to achieve the participation goal; it was assumed that there would be attrition at several points in the identification and referral process, as described in previous chapters.

Table 4.1 shows the total number of noncustodial parents who were referred to PFS and the number who participated in both peer support and an employment and training activity or reported employment in each site through June 1993. The referral figures indicate that several of the sites were quite successful in identifying and contacting eligible participants. Overall, more than 3,400 noncustodial parents had been referred to PFS by that time, an average of nearly 400 per site. (The total exceeded 4,000 by October 1993.) The Ohio site had referred well over 600 noncustodial parents, and the Michigan site more than 500; several other sites had referred more than 300 parents.

Two issues should be kept in mind in assessing these figures. First, in most sites, the number of referrals represented only a fraction of the total number of noncustodial parents who were identified as potentially eligible for PFS. As noted earlier, some of those who were identified were never scheduled for hearings or appointments with CSE staff, and some of those who were scheduled failed to show up. Others showed up but were not referred to PFS, usually because they acknowledged that they were employed or were found to be ineligible for another reason (for example, they were disabled). PFS certainly affected the behavior of some of these individuals, in some cases by

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[1](...continued)
the term "referral" is also used to describe instances where noncustodial parents came to PFS voluntarily, without a court hearing, and completed the BIF at the PFS office.

TABLE 4.1

PARENTS' FAIR SHARE REFERRAL AND PARTICIPANT TOTALS THROUGH JUNE 1993, BY SITE

Measure	Alabama	Florida	Massa-chusetts	Michigan	Minnesota (combined)	Missouri	New Jersey	Ohio (combined)	Tennessee	All Sites
Number of noncustodial parents referred to PFS	242	293	348	561	319	245	385	664	374	3,431
Number of noncustodial parents who participated in peer support and employment/training or reported employment	170	169	195	218	225	183	165	311	203	1,855
Month of first referral	6/92	8/92	7/92	4/92	3/92	7/92	5/92	5/92	6/92	-- (a)

SOURCE: MDRC calculations from PFS Management Information System data.

NOTE: (a) Where data are not applicable, dashes are used.

persuading them to find or acknowledge employment without being referred into the program.[2]

Second, the differing intake procedures described in Chapter 2 mean that the definition of the term "referral" differed from site to site. The most important difference was that in Missouri (and, to some extent, in New Jersey) the number of referrals actually reflected the number of noncustodial parents who voluntarily appeared for a recruitment meeting and requested PFS services; in the other sites, it reflected the number who were ordered or referred into PFS during a court hearing or an appointment with CSE staff.

The participant totals are somewhat easier to interpret. Since pilot operations began in mid-1992 in most sites and were expected to continue for roughly 18 months, one would expect the sites to have achieved roughly two-thirds of the overall goal by June 1993 – in other words, to have served at least 200 participants – by that point. The data in Table 4.1 illustrate that four of the pilot sites (Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, and Tennessee)[3] were on this pace, and two others (Massachusetts and Missouri) were quite close. New Jersey had only recently hired staff to coordinate its court-based referral process, so its totals, while low overall, were rising quickly. The other two sites, Alabama and Florida, had more difficulty building effective referral systems. The nine-site total, 1,855, represented more than two-thirds of the overall goal of 2,700 participants.

II. Participation Rates

Participation rates – defined as the proportion of those referred to PFS who participated in program activities within a specified period – provide important evidence of the sites' ability to move noncustodial parents from the referral stage into program activities. They may also point to the strength of monitoring and noncompliance follow-up procedures. Moreover, during Phase II of PFS, a relatively high participation rate among those randomly assigned to the program group will, it is assumed, be a precondition for measuring impacts.[4]

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[2]In an impact evaluation, the process of randomly assigning individuals to the program group or the control group would be placed earlier in the intake flow than the point of BIF completion during the pilot phase in order to capture these effects. As a consequence, the number of noncustodial parents entering the research sample for such an analysis would be substantially larger than the number referred to PFS during the pilot.

[3]In Minnesota and Ohio, totals for the two counties are combined.

[4]This is true both because high participation rates usually signal a strong program, and because higher rates mean that a smaller research sample is needed to detect program impacts.

A. Overall Participation Rates and Levels

In the pilot phase, the point of referral to PFS (and BIF completion) was the closest available approximation to the point of random assignment in an experimental evaluation. Table 4.2 indicates the percentage of those referred to PFS who participated in any program activity within four months of the referral.[5] This figure, which includes all noncustodial parents referred to PFS by the end of February 1993, is approximately 67 percent. The participation rates for the two main PFS components – employment and training and peer support – were approximately 50 percent and 60 percent, respectively.[6]

The table also shows that the overall participation rate varied considerably across sites, from 50 percent in Michigan to 90 percent in Missouri. This disparity is primarily attributable to differences in intake procedures and service populations. For example, one would expect a high participation rate in Missouri because the pilot program primarily served volunteers. Thus, the population of "referred" individuals in this site included only noncustodial parents who appeared at a recruitment meeting and requested services; many others were recruited and never showed up, but they are not counted in the base. In most other sites, the base includes all noncustodial parents who were referred or ordered into PFS during a court hearing or meeting with CSE staff. The nature of this "message" (that is, the level of "mandatoriness"), the authority of its deliverer (for example, a judge or hearing officer versus a CSE staff person), the site's ability to follow up on those who failed to respond, and the real or perceived consequences of noncooperation all varied across sites and probably affected the participation rate.[7] For example, if noncustodial parents were ordered into PFS by a

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[5]This definition of "participation" differs from the one used in the previous section. The analysis in this section, which is consistent with analyses conducted in other MDRC studies of mandatory programs, follows each individual for the same number of months following referral (four months, in this case) and counts as a "participant" anyone who attended at least one session of one program activity during that time. The previous section used a different definition of a participant and simply counted the number of noncustodial parents who were referred to and participated in PFS from the time the program started operating (which varied from site to site) through the end of June 1993.

[6]Tables in later chapters provide detailed information on participation in the peer support and employment and training components. These tables generally examine only the noncustodial parents who participated in the specified activity. In examining those tables, it is important to remember that they include only the 50 or 60 percent of referred noncustodial parents identified in Table 4.2 as having participated in these components.

[7]The rate may also have been affected by the no-show rate for court hearings or CSE appointments. If this rate was very high, it may be that the few noncustodial parents who did show up in court were quite likely to cooperate with the PFS order. If the no-show rate was low, the referral population may have included a more diverse group of parents, including many who could find jobs on their own or evade the PFS participation order. No information is available on this issue from the pilot phase.

TABLE 4.2

PARTICIPATION IN PFS ACTIVITIES WITHIN FOUR MONTHS OF REFERRAL AMONG NONCUSTODIAL PARENTS REFERRED TO PARENTS' FAIR SHARE

Sample and Measure	Alabama	Florida	Massa-chusetts	Michigan	Minnesota		Missouri	New Jersey	Ohio		Tennessee	All Sites
					Anoka	Dakota			Butler	Mont.		
All noncustodial parents referred to PFS												
Ever participated in any PFS activity (%)	81.4	81.1	66.7	50.0	68.6	71.4	90.0	76.1	64.9	53.1	71.1	66.6
Ever participated in peer support (%)	73.7	81.1	51.3	37.7	50.0	68.6	89.3	72.1	61.9	51.7	70.5	60.2
Ever participated in any employment/ training activities (%)	72.4	49.3	58.8	40.2	51.3	38.1	80.7	46.6	55.2	33.6	54.4	49.9
Sample size	156	148	228	438	156	105	140	247	134	354	298	2,404
Noncustodial parents who participated in a PFS activity (a)												
Total number of sessions attended (%)												
1-3	13.4	9.2	13.8	21.9	25.2	25.3	6.4	19.2	16.1	9.0	3.8	14.1
4-6	11.8	5.8	4.0	9.6	8.4	9.3	5.6	11.2	5.8	4.3	5.2	7.3
7-9	11.0	9.2	1.3	5.5	15.0	6.7	11.9	13.3	5.8	7.5	3.3	7.9
10-19	21.3	35.0	14.5	22.8	29.9	25.3	27.8	20.2	26.4	19.2	7.6	21.2
20-29	18.9	14.2	20.4	14.6	6.5	10.7	11.9	15.4	26.4	16.0	15.6	15.6
30-39	10.2	13.3	14.5	8.2	3.7	6.7	12.7	4.8	12.6	15.4	11.8	10.5
40 or more	13.4	13.3	31.6	17.4	11.2	16.0	23.8	16.0	6.9	28.7	52.8	23.4
Average number of sessions attended	21.3	20.5	34.7	21.1	16.3	18.7	26.8	20.0	20.0	28.8	42.9	26.0
Active in last month of follow-up (%)	45.7	52.5	44.7	16.0	41.1	40.0	50.8	28.2	11.5	64.4	56.1	41.6
Sample size	127	120	152	219	107	75	126	188	87	188	212	1,601

SOURCE: MDRC calculations from PFS Management Information System data.

NOTES: Includes all noncustodial parents referred to Parents' Fair Share through February 28, 1993.

PFS activities include peer support, basic education, job search/job-readiness, skills training, mediation, and on-the-job training (OJT).

(a) This subcategory includes noncustodial parents referred to Parents' Fair Share through February 28, 1993, who participated in a PFS activity within four months of referral.

judge with a reputation for jailing people, this might have had a different effect than if the order had been issued by a CSE staff person.

The bottom panel of Table 4.2 shows the total number of PFS activity sessions attended within four months of referral by those who participated in any PFS activity.[8] The definition of a "session" depended on the activity, and ranged from a 90- to 120-minute peer support meeting to a full day of work in an on-the-job-training (OJT) position.[9] The table shows that the overall average number of sessions was about 26. More than 70 percent of all participants attended 10 or more activity sessions, and nearly 25 percent attended 40 or more sessions. Again, the patterns varied across sites and were affected by the program model. As will be discussed in subsequent chapters, the types of activity assignments and the expectations for participants varied from site to site and affected how many sessions participants were required to attend.

Other figures (not shown in the table) suggest that the relatively short, four-month follow-up period did not detract much from the overall participation rates reported earlier. In other words, relatively few individuals began their PFS participation in the fifth month or later. For example, for those referred to PFS relatively early on, by the end of December 1992, the rate of participation within six months after referral was 66.3 percent, compared to a rate of 65 percent within four months after referral.

However, the six-month data for this early group do suggest that many participants remained active in PFS activities beyond the fourth month; the average number of sessions attended rose from 26 within four months to nearly 33 within six months. This suggests that the figures in the bottom panel of Table 4.2 would be larger if additional follow-up data were available. This is also indicated by the bottom row of the table, which shows that 42 percent of the participants were still attending program activities in the fourth month after referral; many of these individuals continued to participate in months five and six, and beyond.

B. Participation by Component

Table 4.3 shows the rates of participation in the key PFS components. This table includes only

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[8]As noted in Chapter 1, the Management Information System (MIS) developed for the pilot phase did not capture all PFS activities. For example, individual case management and counseling sessions were not counted.

[9]In many cases, participants attended more than one activity (for example, peer support and job club) in the same day, which means that "sessions attended" and "days attended" are not synonymous; in fact, the figures for sessions attended represent an upper bound on the number of days a participant attended PFS activities.

TABLE 4.3

PARTICIPATION IN SELECTED PFS ACTIVITIES WITHIN FOUR MONTHS OF REFERRAL AMONG NONCUSTODIAL PARENTS WHO PARTICIPATED IN PARENTS' FAIR SHARE

Measure	Alabama	Florida	Massa-chusetts	Michigan	Minnesota		Missouri	New Jersey	Ohio		Tennessee	All Sites
					Anoka	Dakota			Butler	Mont.		
Ever participated in peer support (%)	90.6	100.0	77.0	75.3	72.9	96.0	99.2	94.7	95.4	97.3	99.1	90.3
Average number of sessions attended by those who participated in peer support	8.9	15.3	10.4	5.1	7.4	7.0	8.8	7.6	9.4	20.8	17.6	11.6
Ever participated in any employment/ training activities (%) (a)	89.0	60.8	88.2	80.4	74.8	53.3	89.7	61.2	85.1	63.3	76.4	74.9
Average number of sessions attended by those who participated in any employment/training activities	14.9	8.4	30.3	21.5	14.5	22.6	20.1	20.9	13.0	13.6	33.3	20.7
Ever participated in mediation (%)	0.8	5.0 (b)	0.0	3.7	0.9	1.3	1.6	0.0	5.8	1.6	2.8	2.1
Sample size	127	120	152	219	107	75	126	188	87	188	212	1,601

SOURCE: MDRC calculations from PFS Management Information System data.

NOTES: Includes all noncustodial parents referred to Parents' Fair Share through February 28, 1993, who participated in a PFS activity within four months of referral.

(a) Employment and training activities include basic education, job search/job-readiness, skills training, and OJT.

(b) Mediation participation is probably overstated. In Florida, meetings between noncustodial parents and mediators were recorded as mediation sessions in some cases even if no mediation took place.

those noncustodial parents who participated in a PFS activity – the same group that was the focus of the bottom panel of Table 4.2. Once again, the table examines the first four months following the referral.

These data show that nearly all noncustodial parents who participated in PFS activities attended peer support. As will be discussed further in Chapter 5, peer support has successfully engaged the participants in almost every site. The average number of peer support sessions attended for those who participated in this activity was almost 12 – a surprisingly high figure given the popular perception that men may have difficulty "opening up" to others.[10]

Participation in employment and training activities was somewhat less consistent, in part because these activities tended to begin later in the program sequence than did peer support. Still, about three-fourths of the participants attended at least one employment and training activity within four months. The average number of sessions for those who participated was nearly 21. Once again, there was considerable variation across sites owing in part to differing patterns of scheduling and participation in specific types of employment and training activities. This is discussed further in Chapter 7.

The last row of Table 4.3 shows that very few participants attended mediation. This was a voluntary activity that usually required participation by custodial parents. As discussed further in Chapter 8, most sites found it difficult to obtain this cooperation.

C. Program "Coverage"

The participation figures discussed above can be fully assessed only by considering the activities of the nonparticipants; many of those who did not participate in PFS activities may have been engaging in activities – such as employment – that are consistent with the goals of PFS. Others may not have engaged in such activities, but may have been promptly identified and referred back to the CSE agency for further enforcement action.[11]

Table 4.4 indicates that more than 80 percent of those referred to PFS either participated in program activities, reported being employed, or were referred back to the CSE program for noncooperation. The figure was high in all sites where complete data were available. This indicates that the number of people who "slipped through the cracks" was relatively small and suggests that effective monitoring and follow-up procedures were in place.[12]

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[10]As explained in Chapter 5, expectations regarding the number of peer support sessions participants were required to attend varied from site to site.

[11]Most sites took immediate action in response to a failure to appear for the initial orientation; however, policies for those who began to participate but later started missing sessions varied from site to site.

[12]It is important to note that delays in the CSE or court systems may have delayed the follow-up on cases after they were referred back for noncooperation. For example, contempt hearings were delayed for several weeks or months in some sites.

TABLE 4.4

PARTICIPATION RATES AND STATUS OF NONPARTICIPANTS WITHIN FOUR MONTHS OF REFERRAL AMONG NONCUSTODIAL PARENTS REFERRED TO PARENTS' FAIR SHARE

Status	Alabama	Florida	Massa-chusetts	Michigan	Minnesota Anoka	Minnesota Dakota	Missouri	New Jersey	Ohio Butler	Ohio Mont.	Tennessee	All Sites
Ever participated in a PFS activity (%)	81.4	81.1	66.7	50.0	68.6	71.4	90.0	76.1	64.9	53.1	71.1	66.6
Never participated in a PFS activity (%)	18.6	18.9	33.3	50.0	30.1	28.6	10.0	23.9	35.1	46.9	28.9	33.3
Never participated and												
Ever reported employment (%)	4.5	5.4	5.3	3.4	14.7	14.3	0.0	0.8	7.5	9.0	1.0	5.3
Ever referred to CSE for noncooperation (%)	12.8	5.4	12.7	26.0	0.6	1.0	0.0	0.0	0.8	11.3	20.5	11.4
Ever reported employment or referred to CSE for noncooperation (%)	14.7	10.8	17.5	29.5	15.4	15.2	0.0	0.8	8.2	17.8	21.5	16.1
Coverage rate												
Ever participated, reported employment, or referred to CSE for noncooperation (%)	96.2	91.9	84.2	79.5	84.0	86.7	90.0	76.9	73.1	70.9	92.6	82.7
Sample size	156	148	228	438	156	105	140	247	134	354	298	2,404

SOURCE: MDRC calculations from PFS Management Information System data.

NOTES: Percentages for nonparticipants and coverage rates are understated in certain sites – notably Montgomery County, Ohio – because a substantial fraction of nonparticipants in these sites never entered the PFS Management Information System.

In New Jersey and Missouri, some noncustodial parents entered PFS voluntarily. Thus, in both sites, some nonparticipants were volunteers who dropped out of the program.

PFS activities include peer support, basic education, job search/job-readiness, mediation, skills training, and on-the-job training (OJT).

D. Assessing the Participation Rates

There is no obvious benchmark for assessing the PFS participation data described above. However, the best available comparison is probably to welfare-to-work programs such as those evaluated by MDRC. Like PFS, these programs operated through large bureaucratic systems and attempted to mandate participation in employment-related activities by individuals who may not have participated otherwise.

Although direct comparisons are problematic for several reasons, it appears that the rates of participation in PFS activities were somewhat higher than the rates measured in previous evaluations of mandatory welfare-to-work programs that produced statistically significant earnings and employment impacts. For example, in an evaluation of California's Greater Avenues for Independence (GAIN) Program, MDRC found that about one-third of those who were referred to GAIN by welfare eligibility workers actually participated in a GAIN activity within six months.[13] This rate was somewhat higher – about 46 percent within nine months – in a pre-GAIN welfare-to-work program in San Diego.[14] In PFS, the rates of participation within four months after referral in sites that served primarily mandatory clients (that is, excluding Missouri) ranged from 50 to 81 percent.[15]

Several factors should be considered in making this comparison. First, many of those who did not participate in the welfare-to-work programs were deferred or excused for program-recognized reasons or left welfare. In contrast, there were relatively few reasons why a noncustodial parent referred to PFS would not have been expected to participate.[16] Second, the penalties for noncooperation are quite different. In welfare-to-work programs, noncooperative individuals risked reductions in their welfare grants. In PFS, nonparticipants could, at least in theory, be incarcerated; the likelihood that this would actually occur varied from site to site.[17] Third, there are important differences in the target populations. For example, most individuals who were required to participate in welfare-to-work programs were custodial parents (usually mothers) with childrearing responsibilities.

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[13]Riccio et al., 1989.

[14]Goldman, Friedlander, and Long, 1986.

[15]The GAIN evaluation also included data on the length of participation in program activities among those who participated. However, it is quite difficult to compare these data – which were measured in months – with the PFS data on sessions attended.

[16]A noncustodial parent's CSE case could close or, as described in the previous section, the parent could report being employed and begin paying child support.

[17]It is also important to note that, during Phase II, participation rates will include all noncustodial parents who are randomly assigned to the program group. Under current plans, this assignment will take place just before court hearings, rather than just after hearings (the point at which the BIF was completed during the pilot). It is expected that some noncustodial parents, when informed about the PFS participation requirement, will confess to previously unreported employment, and thus will not be referred to the program. This will probably lead to lower participation rates than those measured in the pilot.

III. Conclusions

At the most basic level, the operational feasibility of a mandatory program may be measured by the ability of sites to identify and contact large numbers of eligible individuals, move them into program activities, monitor their participation, and respond to noncompliance. The results presented in this chapter suggest that PFS has passed this critical test. Most of the sites have met the scale requirements set by MDRC in preparation for the project, and the rates of participation in program activities appear to have been higher than those achieved in mandatory welfare-to-work programs with similar objectives. Moreover, the "coverage" data suggest that relatively few eligible noncustodial parents fell through the cracks. Subsequent chapters will examine the experiences of participants in the various program components.

CHAPTER 5

PEER SUPPORT

This chapter describes how the peer support component operated in the PFS pilot sites and examines how this unusual activity was experienced by participants and staff. The chapter begins with a brief introduction to peer support, describing what it is and why it was part of the PFS service package. The next section describes the agencies and staff that were responsible for peer support during the pilot phase, the nature of the sessions, and the patterns of participation by noncustodial parents. The following section examines the experiences of participants and staff based in part on individual interviews. The final section discusses some lessons for operating peer support in Phase II of the demonstration.

Peer support was included in the PFS model largely to enhance the effectiveness of employment and training services. In fact, it emerged as the core of the PFS program in most sites and, judging by the levels of participation and enthusiasm, the most successful program component. Participants and staff consistently contended that peer support stimulated profound changes in outlooks and behavior that created the preconditions for success in the employment and training component. Of course, peer support's potency was limited in some respects, and the changes it induced may have been temporary. Nevertheless, the early results clearly demonstrate that this component has become an indispensable part of the PFS approach and a potentially formidable tool for empowering and inspiring participants to change their lives.

I. The Role of Peer Support in PFS

The key objective of PFS is to increase the amount of child support paid by the noncustodial parents of children receiving AFDC. As discussed in Chapter 3, lack of income as a result of unemployment or underemployment is a critical barrier to paying child support for many of these parents. Thus, employment and job training are core services in the PFS program design. Enhanced child support enforcement, discussed in Chapter 6, is also a core PFS component. Tailored to the specific circumstances of poor noncustodial parents, the enhanced CSE component is intended to ensure that these men do not "slip through the cracks" of the system charged with making parental obligations real, and that the system responds flexibly to their circumstances.

Offering the opportunity to learn job skills and to work may be the key to increasing child support payment rates for some poor men, while putting in place an efficient and responsive CSE system is expected to convert others into regular payers. But these two components may not be sufficient for many members of the PFS target group. Their ideas about what it means to be a parent and a provider have to change before either the opportunity for a job or the threat of enforcement will lead to long-term changes in their child support payment patterns.

In background research conducted for PFS using data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY), Ronald Ferguson found that young fathers' child support payment patterns were linked less to their total earnings than to the amount they worked (measured in weeks per year), and to a set of family background, lifestyle, and attitude variables. Interestingly, a young man's "human capital" (measured by years of schooling and test scores) was found to influence his weekly earnings, but *not* the number of weeks he worked. Rather, weeks worked were linked to many of the same background and attitude variables that affect child support payments.[1]

Applying these data to PFS, Ferguson concluded that an intervention consisting solely of employment and training (that is, human-capital-building) and enforcement activities would not necessarily lead to regular work and child support payments. Rather, he suggested that a successful program would also need to address "social and psychological factors that lead men to choose against working regularly at the wages that are available to them"[2] and making regular child support payments. These findings, along with recommendations offered by practitioners, led MDRC to conclude that PFS should include – in addition to an employment and training component – activities aimed at increasing the fathers' commitment to mainstream work and child support.

At the same time, qualitative research, including focus group discussions with noncustodial parents,[3] suggested that it would be difficult to engage noncustodial parents in any program that was perceived to be linked to the CSE system; many low-income noncustodial parents see this system as fundamentally unfair and one-sided. Thus, in order to persuade these parents to make a serious commitment to improving their skills, PFS would need to reach out to them in a way the system had rarely done in the past.

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[1]These included self-esteem measures (those with higher self-esteem tended to work more weeks per year), whether the young father's parents worked when he was young (those with working parents were more likely to work and pay), and the age when he first had sex (earlier sex is associated with lower payment rates).

[2]Unpublished research conducted for MDRC.

[3]Furstenberg, Sherwood, and Sullivan, 1992.

A. What Is Peer Support in PFS?

"Peer support" is the approach that was chosen to try to engage noncustodial parents and offer them new perspectives on child support and fatherhood. Based on a group counseling and education model that is used for many types of behavior-change interventions, this component relies on a detailed curriculum for group meetings, called *Responsible Fatherhood*.[4] "Peer group facilitators" in each PFS site use the curriculum to structure and lead group discussion, although the participants play an important role as one another's teachers, as well as learners.

The underlying hypothesis, and the rationale for the activity's name, is that most poor, noncustodial parents want to do the right thing – at least their own version of it – but need understanding and encouragement from men like themselves to try, as well as new knowledge and skills. It is assumed that men who are perceived to be "in the same boat" will be more successful than society's authority figures at holding up a mirror to the fathers whose talk and behavior are counterproductive. Specifically, the presumption is that most PFS participants do not have to be persuaded of the importance of taking care of their children and playing a role in their children's lives as teacher, guide, protector, and decisionmaker. Nor do they have to be persuaded of the desirability of staying out of legal trouble. Rather, the job of the peer support component – the facilitators and the curriculum in combination – is to help the fathers focus more clearly on their feelings for their children and to bring both the collective experience of the participants and the techniques of behavior change to bear on the problem of *how* these men can become good parents and providers in the very difficult circumstances that confront most of them.

This approach may be controversial. For example, the *Responsible Fatherhood* curriculum implicitly assumes that noncustodial parents should be involved with their children. Research has shown that noncustodial fathers who see their children more frequently are more likely to pay child support.[5] Moreover, it is assumed that children benefit when their fathers play a larger role in their lives.[6] Critics of this view contend that some fathers are not good role models (or are abusive) and

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[4]MDRC and Public/Private Ventures (P/PV) developed the curriculum as a cooperative project for use in two different demonstrations for disadvantaged fathers, PFS and a P/PV project for young unwed fathers. The first version of the curriculum, written for P/PV's Young Fathers Demonstration, was called *Fatherhood Development* and was authored by Jeffrey Johnson and Pamela Wilson. That curriculum was substantially revised by Eileen Hayes for PFS.

[5]See, for example, Seltzer, 1991. This does not necessarily suggest that the relationship is causal – that is, that child support payments will rise if visitation increases.

[6]Recent research suggests that the relationship between father contact and child well-being is not straightforward. In fact, one study found that the level of contact between noncustodial fathers and their

(continued...)

should not be encouraged to stay in contact with their children. Some have also suggested that, by promoting increased father-child contact, peer support may imply a link between visitation and child support; noncustodial parents might respond by refusing to pay support when they feel they are denied visitation. Advocates for custodial parents have fought to create a legal separation between these two issues in order to emphasize that child support must be paid under any circumstances. Other critics have argued more generally that the peer support approach may lend credibility to the noncustodial parents' complaints about the CSE system and the reasons they give for not paying support; in the view of these observers, such complaints and explanations are usually no more than excuses for irresponsible behavior.

These concerns are legitimate, and they are reflected in the design of the component. For example, while peer support does promote father-child contact in general, it also teaches fathers how to be better role models for their children and how to understand their children's behavior and development. Moreover, contact would never be encouraged in a situation where abuse is likely, and a custodial parent would never be forced to accept increased visitation (unless a court issues and enforces a visitation order). Similarly, while peer support encourages noncustodial parents to vent their complaints about the CSE system, the responsibility to pay support is presented as a non-negotiable item. Parents are encouraged (and in some cases assisted) to address their concerns about CSE issues through official channels rather than through noncooperation.

B. The *Responsible Fatherhood* Curriculum

For the PFS sites, the requirements for implementing a peer support component were closely tied to the *Responsible Fatherhood* curriculum. During the pilot phase of the demonstration, every site was required to use this curriculum unless they offered a roughly similar alternative for MDRC's review and approval. Eventually, all but one adopted the curriculum, although a few sites started peer support groups without such a formal plan.

Responsible Fatherhood is divided into 13 sessions, designed to take a total of 90 to 120 minutes each, with three to five activities per session.[7] (See Table 5.1 for a list of topics addressed in the

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[6](...continued)
children "at most appears to have only a weak effect" on several important child outcomes; however, this study did find that children benefited from a close relationship with their fathers (Furstenberg and Harris, 1993).

[7]A longer version of the curriculum, incorporating material for up to 18 sessions, was made available in the fall of 1993.

TABLE 5.1

SESSION TOPICS IN THE *RESPONSIBLE FATHERHOOD* CURRICULUM DURING THE PARENTS' FAIR SHARE PILOT PHASE

I.	Introduction to Responsible Fatherhood
II.	What Are My Values?
III.	Manhood
IV.	The Art of Communication
V.	Fathers as Providers
VI.	Noncustodial Parents: Rights and Responsibilities
VII.	Developing Values in Children
VIII.	Coping as a Single Father (or Sometimes Weekend Dad)
IX.	Dealing with Children's Behaviors
X.	Relationships: Being a Friend, Partner, Parent, and Employee
XI.	Understanding Male/Female Relationships
XII.	Managing Conflict/Handling Anger
XIII.	Building a Support Network: Who's on Your Side?

SOURCE: Hayes, Johnson, and Wilson, 1992.

curriculum.) The session materials begin with a description of "key concepts" and classroom materials needed. Then, for each activity, the curriculum provides detailed instructions on how to conduct it, questions for facilitators to pose for group discussion, and additional resource information to enable facilitators to answer questions of fact. Also included are planning notes that alert facilitators when advance arrangements are needed, tips on facilitation techniques, and pointers for adapting the curriculum to men with specific needs or problems (for example, poor readers).[8]

Among the topics that peer support activities target are: learning about child development and what children need from parents; improving fathers' interpersonal skills and their ability to negotiate with custodial parents, employers, child support agency staff, and other important people in their lives; learning how the child support system works and about fathers' legal rights and responsibilities; forming and reinforcing positive images of themselves as men, fathers, and partners; practicing setting goals and following through on commitments; recognizing patterns in their own behavior that create problems for them and affect their children's well-being; and learning techniques for handling anger and conflict without violence.

The sites were required to send the staff hired to be peer support facilitators to a two-day training workshop held in Minneapolis in June 1992. This workshop featured group-leading demonstrations by the authors of the curriculum and practice sessions for the sites' facilitators, interspersed with discussions of the problems of poor fathers and the principles of intervening to change attitudes and behaviors. A panel discussion with men participating in a local program for fathers concluded the training session.

The peer support mandate for PFS enrollees was to attend the sessions in their site, although there were varying policies for how absences were handled across the sites. While many of the curriculum activities instruct facilitators to ask every participant to contribute an opinion or experience to the group discussion, and facilitators encouraged the men to share their thoughts, the fathers were not required to *actively* participate. Participants were strongly and repeatedly reminded to keep information revealed in peer groups confidential, but privacy and the right to "pass" on discussing personal issues are also recognized principles of the PFS peer support component (and of most peer groups that address other types of behavior change).

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[8]As its name implies, the *Responsible Fatherhood* curriculum is designed for men, who accounted for 97 percent of the PFS population during the pilot phase. MDRC recommended several options for female participants, including integrating them into predominantly male peer support groups, holding separate groups for men and women, and referring them to existing support groups or parenting classes in the community.

II. Peer Support in the Sites

This section examines how the peer support component operated in the PFS pilot sites. It begins by describing the agencies that were responsible for peer support, the facilitators who led the groups, and the typical schedules for group meetings. The next subsection describes the content and atmosphere of the sessions themselves. The final subsection examines the patterns of participation in peer support, based on data reported to MDRC by the sites.

A. Providers

As noted in Chapter 2, each of the PFS pilot sites developed a distinct organizational structure to operate the peer support component.[9] In four sites, peer support groups were facilitated by case managers employed by the PFS lead agency: the JOBS program in Alabama and Missouri, a private nonprofit social services agency in New Jersey, and the CSE agency in Michigan.[10] In these sites, the peer support facilitators were usually responsible for other aspects of the program, such as monitoring participants' activities, providing individual counseling, or developing job openings, in addition to leading groups.

In the other sites, peer support was operated by an outside agency under contract to the lead agency. In these sites, the facilitators were solely or primarily responsible for this aspect of the program (although they typically worked quite closely with other PFS staff).[11] The contracted providers included a branch of Goodwill Industries (Montgomery County, Ohio), a private consultant (Minnesota), family health agencies (Butler County, Ohio, and Florida), a community college (Tennessee), and a nonprofit organization specializing in employment and education programs for "special" populations (Massachusetts).

In most of the sites where outside agencies were selected to provide peer support, these organizations had some relevant experience, either with the PFS population, the subject matter (for example, parenting or life skills), or with operating peer support groups around other topics. For

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[9]As previously noted, two of the PFS sites, Ohio and Minnesota, included two counties each. In Minnesota, the same facilitator ran peer support groups in both counties, and the component operated almost identically. In Ohio, the provider was different in each county, and there were some differences in the component's implementation. Thus, at several points in this chapter, the two Ohio counties (Butler and Montgomery) are discussed separately.

[10]Partway through the pilot, Michigan began a new approach in which Friend of the Court (CSE) case managers and job club instructors employed by a local school district co-facilitated peer support groups.

[11]In Florida, peer support was provided by a private nonprofit social services agency under contract, but the facilitators also acted as case managers and employment counselors for PFS participants.

example, the consultant hired to facilitate peer support groups in Minnesota was associated with the Fathers Resource Center, a private nonprofit education and advocacy organization. In Florida, the agency selected to provide peer support also operated a program for young mothers as part of New Chance, another MDRC demonstration project. The New Chance model includes a group activity based on a curriculum that is similar to *Responsible Fatherhood*.

B. The Facilitators

Although the *Responsible Fatherhood* curriculum is a potentially powerful tool, the success of the peer support component was heavily dependent on the skills of the group facilitators. These individuals had to be able to earn the trust of the participants and help them draw out the ideas that are implicit in the curriculum and learn how to apply them in their everyday lives.

The pilot sites employed between one and four peer support facilitators at any one time; the staffing structure depended on the size of the participant population, the schedule for peer support (discussed below), and the additional responsibilities (if any) that were assigned to facilitators.

There are no demonstration-wide specifications concerning the qualifications or previous experience of the staff hired as facilitators. However, during the demonstration's planning stage, MDRC convened a group of individuals with experience facilitating groups for men to review an early version of the *Responsible Fatherhood* curriculum and to develop a profile of the ideal facilitator.[12] This profile stressed that specific knowledge about the PFS population and the program area could be learned, but that sensitivity and an ability to communicate with the participants had to be part of a facilitator's personality. Thus, in hiring facilitators, sites were encouraged to carefully assess each candidate's ability to listen to and understand other people. The profile also emphasized that facilitators had to be objective and nonjudgmental, that they had to be willing to let participants help set the agenda for the group, and that they had to believe in the participants. Finally, the group noted that successful facilitators often serve as role models for group members. Thus, whenever possible, sites were urged to hire facilitators whose backgrounds and cultural experiences were similar to those of the participant population.

In general, the PFS sites were able to find high-quality staff for the peer support component. Many of the facilitators had substantial experience in group facilitation, counseling, social work, or another related field. Several had previous experience in chemical dependency counseling in

[12]Several members of this group later became PFS peer support facilitators themselves.

community organizations. Others had advanced degrees in counseling or social work. But, while relevant training and experience are obviously a major plus, they are not always necessary; in one site, the facilitators were promoted from positions as AFDC eligibility workers.

Overall, the gender and ethnic characteristics of the facilitators generally matched those of the PFS population (see Chapter 3): Almost 90 percent of the facilitators were men, and more than two-thirds were African-American. Turnover was relatively low during the pilot phase; as of August 1993, individuals who participated in the initial training session for facilitators were still on the job in eight of the nine pilot sites.[13]

C. Schedules and Sequence

As described in Chapter 2, participants usually joined a peer support group soon after their initial orientation to PFS, often before beginning employment and training or other PFS activities. This sequence was generally chosen because staff discovered that peer support often helped participants handle the anger and resentment many of them felt about being required to participate in PFS, thereby increasing their ability to benefit from employment preparation activities. Peer support can also lend credibility to PFS as a whole by showing that the program takes the views of noncustodial parents seriously; this, in turn, may increase participants' willingness to stay involved. Sites that initially did not follow this approach quickly shifted peer support closer to the beginning of the program sequence.

In several sites, including Missouri, New Jersey, and Tennessee, participants usually completed the full peer support curriculum before moving to employment and training activities. This involved roughly 10 sessions over a two- to three-week period in Missouri and New Jersey, and 25 sessions over five weeks in Tennessee, where the *Responsible Fatherhood* curriculum was preceded by a two-week course on *Survival Skills for Men*.[14]

In the other sites, participants usually started employment and training activities shortly after beginning peer support, and remained active in both components concurrently. Peer support tended to meet two to three times a week in these sites, and continued for varying lengths of time. The criteria for completing peer support were not always clearly defined, but usually included finishing a specific number of sessions of the *Responsible Fatherhood* curriculum (usually 10 to 13). The longest periods of participation tended to be in Montgomery County, Ohio, where participants were often expected to attend peer support three times a week for four to six months before "graduating" to a

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[13]Another training conference will be held prior to the beginning of Phase II.

[14]The *Survival Skills* curriculum focuses in part on job-readiness training.

once-a-week schedule that continued indefinitely on a voluntary basis.[15] Most sites held periodic "graduation" ceremonies to recognize participants who completed the peer support component. Some sites held evening sessions to facilitate continued attendance by employed participants.

In training sessions prior to the start of the demonstration, MDRC recommended that sites form new peer support groups periodically and then keep these groups together while moving through the curriculum, rather than operating the program on an open-entry basis. This model was advised in order to facilitate "bonding" and the creation of a group identity. However, as might be expected in a program that relies on a complex set of organizational linkages to identify and refer eligible participants, it was difficult for most of the pilot sites to precisely control the rate of referrals into PFS. In these sites, the flow of participants into the program did not always allow for a regular schedule of group start-ups. Given the need to engage participants quickly, staff in most of these sites decided that it was necessary to integrate participants into existing peer support groups, at least in some cases.[16] Facilitators adopted a number of strategies to ease this process. For example, in some sites, the *Responsible Fatherhood* modules were offered in an unending cycle; participants could enter at any time in the cycle and then were expected to remain involved until they completed all of the required modules. In one site, the facilitator met individually with each participant who was joining an existing group to summarize the topics that had been covered prior to his arrival.

D. The Sessions

Peer support sessions included as few as three participants and as many as 20 (the recommended number was 8 to 12). They usually lasted 90 to 120 minutes and met in a variety of settings. In several sites, including Florida, Massachusetts, Minnesota, and New Jersey, most PFS activities – including peer support meetings – took place in the main PFS program office. In other sites, where program activities were more dispersed, peer support meetings took place in churches, schools, welfare offices, college campuses, or other locations in the community. The groups generally met in a classroom or meeting room, with participants sitting in a circle or around a table and the facilitator either sitting with them or standing as he or she led the session.

The content of meetings usually revolved around the *Responsible Fatherhood* curriculum. The

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[15]In this site, modules of the curriculum often took three to four sessions to complete.

[16]Some sites chose not to operate open-entry peer support programs. Several strategies were developed to prevent attrition while participants waited for a new cycle to begin. For example, in Tennessee, participants were placed into basic education activities during this period, and in New Jersey, they worked individually with case managers.

sessions outlined in the curriculum generally begin with an activity called "What's New?" designed to bring the group together and review what has happened in participants' lives since the last meeting. This is usually followed by one or more exercises that actively engage the group. These may take the form of a game or contest, a role-playing activity, presentation of hypothetical scenarios to which the group reacts, or completion of a handout that elicits the participants' views about specific issues.[17] The facilitator then leads a discussion in which participants first report what they did and felt during the activity, and then examine in depth why they acted and thought as they did. Finally, participants are asked to connect the activity to real-world situations, and to think about how they would apply the ideas in their own lives.

Peer support sessions were meant to be interactive rather than adopting a traditional teacher-student structure. Facilitators often found that they had to initiate most of the discussion during the early sessions, but talked less and less as the participants became more comfortable. Sessions tended to be quite lively; participants were engaged, and discussions often became boisterous or heated. Depending on the topic, the mood might be lighthearted or extremely intense. Facilitators in several sites reported that discussions of male-female relationships and race relations tended to provoke the most emotional discussions. Facilitators were often challenged to keep these intense discussions moving in a productive direction, and to bring positive closure to the ideas and issues raised so that participants came away with a clear sense of the session's purpose and key points.

Although the *Responsible Fatherhood* curriculum was designed as a guide for the peer support sessions, facilitators were expected to mold the curriculum to suit their groups, and to add other activities to the peer support component where appropriate. For example, a facilitator might have decided that it was important to address a pressing issue that was on the participants' minds when they came in for the session, rather than adhering rigidly to the curriculum. Thus, a topic that emerged during the "What's New?" segment might have stimulated a longer discussion that preempted the planned activity. Most facilitators felt that it was important to allow the participants to "share ownership" of the group in this manner, rather than insisting on conforming strictly to the prescribed curriculum every day.

Many of the facilitators supplemented the curriculum with additional activities. This was particularly true in Montgomery County, Ohio, where the facilitators greatly expanded the scope of

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[17]Each module of the curriculum includes several possible activities. Facilitators are encouraged to select the activity(ies) that would work best given the character of the participants in each group.

the peer support component. "Extracurricular" activities in this site included a picnic and Easter egg hunt for participants and their children, a cookout, a basketball game between participants and the Dayton Police Department, a breakfast meeting with the Mayor of Dayton, and sessions with other local elected officials. Guest speakers from the CSE agency, the courts, the police department, and local health and social services agencies visited peer support groups to discuss topics ranging from AIDS prevention and immunization of children to violence prevention, drug abuse, and child support rights and responsibilities. Panels of women presented their perspectives on child support, male-female relationships, sexism, and other issues. In one case, a facilitator visited many of the participants' children in school and solicited questions from the children for their fathers. Some of these special activities involved members of several concurrently running peer support groups, and drew as many as 80 participants. The peer support program generated strong community support and favorable press coverage for PFS on numerous occasions.

Other sites also organized a variety of social and recreational activities for participants and often used guest speakers. The Tennessee site periodically organized low-cost outings to demonstrate that father-child activities did not need to be expensive. CSE staff and court officials visited groups in most sites to help participants understand how the system operates. Other guest speakers included a U.S. Senator (New Jersey) and the head of the state health and welfare agency (Missouri).

E. Participation Patterns

In most of the pilot sites, peer support was quite successful in engaging PFS participants, especially given the fact that most of the noncustodial parents did not volunteer for the program. Chapter 4 indicated that, overall, about 60 percent of those referred to PFS attended at least one peer support session within four months of being referred to PFS. It also showed that the vast majority of noncustodial parents who were active in PFS at all participated in peer support; only about 10 percent of PFS participants never attended a peer support session.

Table 5.2 shows that, among those noncustodial parents who appeared for at least one session of peer support, the average number of sessions attended within four months of referral was nearly 12 (there were 13 core sessions in the *Responsible Fatherhood* curriculum). The table also indicates that about one in five participants dropped out quickly, having attended only one to three sessions. Those who stayed active beyond this point were quite likely to complete the full number of expected sessions. This is consistent with the perceptions of facilitators, as described below.

The overall averages mask some large differences across sites. For example, the average

TABLE 5.2

PARTICIPATION LEVELS IN PEER SUPPORT WITHIN FOUR MONTHS OF REFERRAL TO PARENTS' FAIR SHARE AMONG NONCUSTODIAL PARENTS WHO PARTICIPATED IN PEER SUPPORT

Measure	Alabama	Florida	Massa-chusetts	Michigan	Minnesota		Missouri	New Jersey	Ohio		Tennessee	All Sites
					Anoka	Dakota			Butler	Mont.		
Total number of sessions attended (%)												
1-3	24.4	10.0	17.1	50.3	23.1	29.2	12.0	23.0	26.5	10.4	3.8	19.9
4-6	20.0	12.5	8.6	20.0	23.1	20.8	12.8	20.2	19.3	4.9	14.3	15.3
7-9	15.7	11.7	16.2	13.9	11.5	12.5	27.2	35.4	19.3	6.6	5.7	15.8
10-19	31.3	35.0	50.4	13.9	41.0	37.5	48.0	16.3	22.9	24.0	18.1	28.3
20-29	8.7	19.2	6.8	1.8	0.0	0.0	0.0	4.5	7.2	28.4	52.9	15.3
30 or more	0.0	11.7	0.9	0.0	1.3	0.0	0.0	0.6	4.8	25.7	5.2	5.5
Average number of sessions attended	8.9	15.3	10.4	5.1	7.4	7.0	8.8	7.6	9.4	20.8	17.6	11.6
Attended peer support in last month of follow-up (%)	40.0	50.8	1.7	9.7	10.3	15.3	22.4	5.6	8.4	62.3	8.6	22.3
Approximate number of sessions expected to attend	13	13	9	13	12	12	9	12	12	40+	25	-- (a)
Sample size	115	120	117	165	78	72	125	178	83	183	210	1,446

SOURCE: MDRC calculations from PFS Management Information System data.

NOTES: Includes all noncustodial parents referred to Parents' Fair Share through February 28, 1993, who participated in peer support within four months of referral.

(a) Where data are not applicable, dashes are used.

number of sessions per peer support participant ranged from about five in Michigan to more than 20 in Montgomery County, Ohio (where two-thirds were still active in peer support in the fourth month of follow-up). In Florida, Massachusetts, Montgomery County, Ohio, and Tennessee, more than half of those who participated in peer support attended at least 10 sessions. This proportion was more than 75 percent in Tennessee and nearly 80 percent in Montgomery County.

Of course, the average number of sessions per participant partly reflected the site's expectations; the bottom row of the table indicates the approximate number of sessions participants were expected to attend in each site. However, the average also provides some evidence about the degree to which peer support succeeded in engaging participants in each site. It is notable that the sites with the largest average number of sessions attended and the highest proportion of participants attending 10 or more sessions (Florida, Massachusetts, Ohio, and Tennessee) were all sites where responsibility for peer support was contracted to an outside agency. As noted earlier, facilitators in these sites were usually responsible only for peer support, while in other sites, groups were often facilitated by PFS case managers who also had other duties. It may be that peer support received more concentrated attention in the former sites, or that the facilitators had greater expertise and experience working in a group – as opposed to an individual – setting.

Another way to look at peer support participation is to examine attendance at particular sessions and the facilitators' perceptions of how many of the attendees were actively involved in the discussion. This was done by examining feedback forms completed by facilitators as part of an assessment of the *Responsible Fatherhood* curriculum. These data suggest that, for most modules of the curriculum, 70 to 75 percent of the noncustodial parents who were expected to attend a given session were actually present; some fraction of those who were not present had good excuses. Of those present, the facilitators estimated that 70 to 85 percent actively participated in the discussion.

III. Peer Support Through the Eyes of Participants

This section looks at peer support from the perspective of the noncustodial parents who experienced it and the facilitators who led groups. It relies heavily on 19 individual interviews with PFS participants in New Jersey, Ohio, and Tennessee (as described in Chapter 3).[18] It begins by

[18]As discussed in Chapter 3, the noncustodial parents who were interviewed for this chapter may not have been typical of the broader population because they had completed (or almost completed) the peer support component.

examining the participants' perceptions of peer support: their initial impressions, the process of becoming attached to the group, and the kinds of changes that often followed. The final sections discuss the views of participants and facilitators as to why peer support can be so successful and also examine some of its limitations.

A. First Impressions

As discussed in Chapter 3, many noncustodial parents were initially angry and resentful about being ordered to participate in PFS and skeptical about the program's ability to help them. This skepticism extended to peer support. Many of the participants who were interviewed for this study said they were quiet and cautious during early sessions of peer support as they assessed the program, the other group members, and the facilitator. As one participant put it: "You think about: is it for me or against me?" Others said they were suspicious of the other group members, initially thinking they were "bellyachers" or people with "serious mental problems." Some were skeptical about the facilitator's ability to understand their plight. One said he initially saw the facilitator as a "college guy . . . thinking that he knew it all, that's not in the same situation [as the participants]."

B. Becoming Attached and Opening Up

Most of the interviewees reported getting over their initial skepticism and anger surprisingly quickly, and said they grew strongly attached to peer support within a week or two. Almost all of them said they rarely if ever missed a session and emphasized that, after the initial period, fear of the courts ceased to be their primary motivation for attending. As one New Jersey participant put it: "It's like addicting after a little while because I was wondering what was going to happen next. It was like an episode." The participation data presented earlier generally confirm that in most sites participants who attended at least a few sessions of peer support were quite likely to remain involved. Facilitators reported that if a participant was going to drop out, he usually did so within the first week. Those who remained past that point tended to be strongly committed.

Observers of peer support sessions were frequently surprised at how quickly participants became willing to discuss highly personal subjects and disclose intimate details of their private lives; many had predicted that men would not be willing to participate in such discussions. And yet, even early group meetings could be highly emotional. Discussions about witnessing childbirth, or of times spent with children, often generated tremendous excitement and enthusiasm. The subject of male-female relationships stirred up strong opinions and loud, raucous exchanges. Participants also regularly discussed or told moving stories about their relationships with their fathers or ex-partners; their

experiences with racism, drugs, alcohol, or crime; feelings of inadequacy as fathers; and other deeply personal subjects. Often, the discussion became quite intense, and touched on subjects that were painful for group members. Sessions often ran over their allotted time, and participants sometimes lingered even longer to talk and socialize.

In some sites, PFS program managers and facilitators may have initially underestimated the ability of peer support to persuade participants to open up. In some cases, this process unearthed serious emotional issues and problems. Discussions sometimes revealed child abuse, domestic violence, drug and alcohol abuse, or criminal activities. One participant described some of the disturbing topics that came up in his group:

> Kids being abused; kids having to do things that are degrading for a child to have to do. Parents neglecting, or children getting caught in between parents fighting . . . Some of them kids have to go through some stuff . . . Your younger days, those are the days you're supposed to enjoy the most . . . Kids, you've got to give them that room to grow. It means a lot to them. Some of those kids, they're just growing up too fast.

Many of the facilitators were not trained mental health professionals. However, they had to be prepared to deal with these deeply rooted problems, and to get outside help for participants when necessary. In other cases, they had to be prepared to break the group's confidence to report child abuse (noncustodial parents were advised of this upfront). Sites were encouraged to ensure that facilitators were closely supervised by staff with clinical training.

In interviews, participants cited a broad range of factors to explain their attachment to peer support and their willingness to open up to the other participants. Several of these are discussed below.

1. **Meeting Others in the Same Boat.** Almost all of the interviewees described the powerful effect of meeting others who were experiencing similar problems; many described how this reduced their own feelings of isolation and powerlessness and made them feel part of the group. Several said they were surprised or relieved to meet other people whose problems seemed even more serious than their own. Participants often became tightly bound to the group and said they felt committed to the other members. Many used words such as "close-knit" and "family" to describe the bonds that formed among group members. The following statements, typical of those made by almost all of the interviewees, illustrate these powerful feelings of belonging:

> Everybody here is peaceful, friendly, and there's a lot to learn . . . We all come from different parts of the city, [but] when everybody comes in it's just like one person is here

> because we all agree on the same things, the same problems . . . I'm very interested in what this has to offer.
>
> It's male bonding, plain and simple. It breaks down the stereotypes that men can't talk to other men about their problems, about their feelings and their emotions . . . Getting a lot of men together with the same problems has a tendency to make other men open up themselves to discuss what's going on with them and to help each other solve their problems . . . You come in as an individual, but nine times out of ten you leave feeling like family.
>
> At first, I was the shy type, keep to myself . . . but after I started going to [peer support] and talking to other fathers about their problems and what they was going through, situations they was having, and I sat back and listened, [I thought]: "Hey, that's basically the same thing I'm going through . . . maybe they can help me out and give me some advice."

For some participants, this process was assisted by early discussions with peer support "veterans" who advised them to give the program a chance. This occurred either because the interviewees had been integrated into existing groups, or because veterans were brought in to meet with groups of new participants. Several participants also noted that they were more willing to open up knowing that what they said would be treated confidentially.

2. <u>Feeling Wanted</u>. Several of the interviewees, perhaps unwilling or unable to discuss their own situations, described their attachment to peer support primarily in terms of their ability to help and guide other fathers. Many were surprised to find that they had this capacity. As one participant put it:

> You learn from one another . . . I might be a help for someone . . . Something that happened to them might have happened to you, and then you sit down and debate about it . . . and you turn around and find out you helped that person . . . you changed that person's way of thinking . . . That motivates a person to want to come to class . . . You've got somebody that cares, when in the past you probably didn't have nobody that cared.

Several of the interviewees recounted, with obvious pride, situations where they said they had helped another group member deal with a problem. Others described how good it felt when their fellow group members greeted them enthusiastically when they arrived for sessions.

In a few cases, older fathers (usually in their forties) said they used their experience to help younger fathers deal with problems. Some of the facilitators noted that older participants sometimes exerted a calming, steadying influence on younger participants in their groups.

3. <u>Relieving Pressure and Speaking Out</u>. For many of the participants, peer support provided a forum to discuss issues that were causing great pain or anxiety in their lives. Several of

the interviewees noted that women often have such opportunities, but that men usually keep such feelings to themselves. One participant put it this way:

> It's a bunch of guys getting together and being able to talk because they can't talk to someone at home or one of their friends . . . about problems they're having. I guess it's men's nature. Women will talk to their best friend, cry, tell them all their problems . . . Just to be able to talk takes a lot of burden off your shoulders . . . and it's in confidence.

One of the interviewees recounted how he had attended peer support only hours after finding out that his mother had died, even though he had only been in the program for two weeks at the time. The other members of the group attended his mother's funeral and, from that point on, he felt strongly bound to the group.

For some participants, peer support clearly provided a refuge from the tense, chaotic, violent conditions in their neighborhoods. As one participant put it:

> The streets are raw, that's uncut . . . I've lived it for 24 years of my life. I've seen a whole lot of crazy things . . . things that scared me out of my wits . . . Sometimes you feel safer coming to someplace where you know there's not a whole lot of violence, it's not animosity, you don't have to deal with anything that makes you angry . . . [you can] get everything off your chest to someone who understands.

4. <u>The Facilitator</u>. Several of the interviewees said the facilitator was primarily responsible for binding them to peer support. Words such as "caring" and "concerned" were frequently used to describe the facilitators. Some participants said they had not had contact with someone who cared so much about them for many years. Several seemed to perceive the facilitator as a father figure, providing discipline they had not received from their own fathers. One said the group was "like a family and he [the facilitator] is the pop."

Others saluted the facilitator for being "nonjudgmental," saying that his ability to listen without scolding or judging was a critical reason participants were willing to open up. Facilitators reported that they had to tread a fine line in reacting to negative statements during sessions. Especially during the early days of a group, it was sometimes necessary to listen to participants voice opinions that were directly contrary to the program's goals in order to "meet them where they are." These facilitators felt that if they had immediately begun to confront participants, they would have been unable to gain the confidence and trust of group members. Over time, as trust developed, they and other group members gradually began to challenge counterproductive views more forcefully.

5. **The Subject Matter.** Many interviewees said they kept coming simply because peer support was "interesting" or because the curriculum activities were "thought-provoking"; several said they had saved the handouts and other materials at home. A number of Ohio participants contacted MDRC to request copies of the *Responsible Fatherhood* curriculum.

C. Changing Perspectives

The bottom-line goal of peer support is to change behavior. However, in order to achieve this objective, several of the facilitators believed, it is sometimes necessary to first change participants' outlooks and perspectives, or at least to help them see that there are different ways to look at important issues in their lives. All reported that a substantial fraction of peer support participants did in fact change in noticeable ways during their time in the program.

Each of the interviewees was able to describe, with little hesitation, concrete ways in which his outlook had changed or expanded as a result of his contact with peer support. Some of these changes were startling, given the relatively short time they had been in contact with the program. One participant, after less than three weeks in peer support, said:

> This [peer support] is the best thing that happened to me since my son . . . This is one of the best things that ever happened to me because I never had nothing to look forward to . . . I feel good about myself now. I'm more relaxed, my nerves aren't as bad. I would shake a glass into pieces, my nerves were so bad. I never had a decent thought up until now.

Other examples of changed outlooks were more specific and seemed to fall into a few basic categories, including the following.

1. **Focusing on Children.** Several of the facilitators said that an important goal of peer support is to help noncustodial parents focus more clearly on their children. They explained that once this is accomplished, the participants can see more concretely how their behavior toward the custodial parent, their work habits, and their child support payment patterns affect the child's well-being. This motivates them to change negative behavior patterns.

Many of the interviewees indicated that rediscovering their feelings for their children was one of the most profound effects of their involvement in peer support. Several said they had begun to expand their idea of fatherhood: They had formerly defined their role strictly in terms of financial support and, when they could not provide this support, began to see themselves as bad parents. Gradually, they began to realize that there was more to being a father. As one participant put it:

> Before, I thought of myself as, "yeah, I'm a father," but that doesn't mean a hell of a lot. I've learned since then that it means a lot more than I thought. It means not just responsibility, not just a paycheck, not a pocketbook, it means you have to be somebody there who is caring and that has the ability to understand what the child is going through . . . It [peer support] does make you sit down and think about the situation between yourself and the ex and the child, and it makes you realize what the child means to you. That's something I'd never really taken into consideration.

Ironically, in order to help participants understand the range of issues associated with fatherhood, facilitators reported that it was often necessary to broaden their focus beyond financial support. One facilitator described the goal of peer support in these words:

> [Helping] the father to bond with his children. Because ultimately, that's going to help both parties . . . Most have the concept that if I take $5 or $10 or $20 by, that's being a father. But there's more to it. If you ask the child 20 years from now what he remembers, it's not the $5 or $10 that you gave, it's the time that you went to the park, or the times you went fishing, the times you sat down and shared your experiences with him. Otherwise, we have a generation that's on the verge of being in the correctional system or dead.

Of course, the challenge for facilitators was to make sure that participants did not begin to define responsible fatherhood strictly in nonfinancial terms, since one of the project's ultimate goals is to improve child support payment rates.

Several interviewees said peer support helped them see the need to set aside quarrels with the custodial parent for the good of the child. Others began to understand the extent to which their behavior influenced their children, and to realize that they could serve as positive role models. More than one said he had never really thought about the importance of listening to a child and understanding his or her viewpoint. One participant characterized his new realization this way:

> Kids are complex . . . Kids go through stages . . . and they're very apt to pick up things and they won't forget it, it'll stay with them. And those things that you can teach them, that you can instill in [them], like your parents put in you, you can put in your children, and maybe they'll come out all right. Because I feel I came out pretty good.

Interestingly, one facilitator who was not a parent himself said he sometimes found it difficult to gain the participants' respect and trust during these discussions. Another, who is a father, explained that he often found it necessary to use "self-disclosure" in addressing this topic because the participants had so little personal experience with positive father figures.

2. <u>Self-Esteem</u>. One of the most common changes reported by interviewees involved developing "confidence" or "self-esteem." Several participants said they had been "depressed" or

"lazy" prior to starting peer support, often because they had internalized a negative view of themselves that had been repeated by the custodial parent, her family, the CSE system, or the labor market. Several used metaphors that described a process of "waking up" after a long period of sleep. One participant said peer support "gives me confidence, gives me something to look forward to." Two others expressed similar sentiments:

> It gave me a big boost of self-confidence that I never had, not since I was 15 . . . You've got to feel good about yourself in order to get by in the world. I've had it, but I never really let it shine, so to speak . . . I had a attitude problem – a short fuse – and I refused to see anything anyone else's way. It was my way or no way. I had a drug and alcohol problem. I started recovering on my own, but this program helped out. It gave me back my self-confidence . . . I want to go forward [with] the rest of my life instead of sitting there watching it go by.

> I kind of saw myself as being a deadbeat dad. You know, you hear "deadbeat dad." But I feel now more like I'm just a dad who had problems.

3. **Handling Anger**. A surprisingly large proportion of interviewees, particularly in Ohio, said peer support had helped them become "calmer" and made them better able to deal with problems without resorting to violence. In fact, one father offered this description of PFS's primary objective:

> Keeping violence down. A lot of fathers, they get frustrated because of their ex-wives . . . a lot of problems with them . . . there's a lot of people fighting. I think you get into the program and you get used to all the guys and you get to know them all pretty well and start talking about your own problems. I think it helps to blow off a lot of steam.

Another interviewee, clearly an extreme case, described with great anger and emotion how his ex-wife was, in his view, ruining his children's lives by allowing drug activity and other negative influences into their home. He said he had considered violence several times, and he insisted that peer support had been instrumental in making him think about the possible consequences of his taking action:

> It [peer support] has kept me from going over there and doing it because I know I'm going to be absolutely no help if I go over and kill that bitch. I'll never be able to salvage the rest of my daughter's life – and my son. Peer support has helped me keep my sanity . . . it's saved my life more than once.

Several interviewees said they or other group members sometimes presented problems or frustrations to the group or the facilitator for discussion before reacting to those matters.

As described above, peer support sessions often exposed participants' intense anger and frustration over their lives. Some of the facilitators discovered that these issues may go beyond what

they are trained to handle; in some cases, participants were referred to mental health professionals for individual counseling or therapy.

4. Other Changes. Participants and facilitators cited a number of other ways in which outlooks changed as a result of peer support. One facilitator noted that many participants developed a broader outlook on what type of behavior is appropriate or acceptable for a man. As one facilitator put it: "When we try to be men, we lose being human." Thus, a key goal of the curriculum is to help participants "redefine manhood."

For a few participants, peer support seemed to have a crucial effect on their willingness to come above ground, enter mainstream society, and deal with problems in a constructive manner. As one interviewee said:

> I learned . . . how he [another participant] dealt with problems as far as fines, police, and judicial stuff. You see, there's two types of people. Either you're gonna confront it, or you're gonna run. And I've always been the type who runs. And he always confronted his, even if he didn't complete what he said he was going to do. I learned that it's better for me to do the confrontation, to say what I can do and what I'm going to try to do, as opposed to just running away and telling them nothing. You know, make them look for me.

In Ohio, where groups tended to be racially mixed, the facilitators initially feared that racial issues would create tension in the group. In fact, few problems emerged. One white participant said that peer support had substantially changed his view of African-American men:

> I was always taught that black guys were cold-hearted bastards that didn't give a shit. The more I started listening to some of these guys who actually gave a shit about where their life was heading, it made a big, big difference. I said, "Hey, these guys ain't bad. They've got problems just like I do." There was a couple of them in my class and it was just like I've known this guy all my life. And the more he talked about his problems, the more I talked about my problems, and then the next guy . . . This male bonding thing is pretty cool . . . Women, it comes natural. With guys it's hard to open up, it's that macho thing.

One of the facilitators said that, for African-American participants, one sign of change comes when a participant begins to realize that "you can't blame whites for your mishaps in life. You have to put your feelings aside and do what's best for the child."

D. Changing Behavior

The interviewees – both participants and facilitators – were quick to admit that opinions and actions can be very different, that people's behavior often does not conform to their own ideals.

Nonetheless, most of the participants insisted that their behavior had also changed in specific ways since they had started peer support. The facilitators also cited numerous specific examples of behavioral change they had witnessed.

These changes took a variety of forms, some of which were unexpected. For example, one participant said he had recently taken up reading again after a long hiatus, which he attributed to depression and tension. Facilitators in Tennessee reported that many of the noncustodial parents changed their personal appearance and grooming over the five-week period when peer support sessions met. Other changes were more consistent with the attitudinal changes described above. A few participants described the behavioral changes as all-encompassing. One participant, who had been released from prison shortly before entering PFS, described himself this way:

> I was always on the streets, stealing and robbing, before I went to the penitentiary. So when I got out of the penitentiary, I figured, "I'm going to do the same thing over again." But then I got into [peer support] and I got to talking about my problems . . . It changed my life . . . I was wild and crazy . . . Now, since I've been through the program, it kind of slowed me down a bit. The only thing I do now is go to work, go home and stay with my kids, and sometimes go to the gym . . . I always had a problem with running the streets from sunup to sundown, and I slowed that down.

Many of the participants said they were seeing their children more regularly, and were more careful about what they did during visits. One participant gave this description of one of his goals:

> Spending quality time with my son. My son is in this generation where I got to spend money. Everything he ever wants, it costs money. And it made me feel bad. When he wanted this stuff, and I didn't have it. TV is bombarding him: "Dad, I want this. Dad, I want that." [And] I'm like, "I don't have it." He's like, "But you're my dad." So I learned how to start doing other things that TV don't bombard him with. Like taking him to the playground and just turning him loose . . . He enjoys doing it, and I enjoy taking him and watching him . . . And I challenge him with his ABCs. I introduce it to him as a game.

Each of the facilitators described at least one participant who had seen his children for the first time in many years after urging by the group.

Other interviewees said they were more aware of the need to communicate with their children. As one put it:

> My daughter, now when I listen to her, I hear her. Instead of me trying to express my opinions . . . instead of trying to make her see things my way, I'm wondering about how does she feel? How does she see things? Instead of me telling her what I want to do, maybe I should ask sometimes: How do you feel about this and that? Like getting her opinion instead of giving her one.

More than one interviewee said the communication skills he had learned or refined in peer support, coupled with his newly developed ability to think problems through calmly, had improved his relationship with a spouse or partner. Facilitators reported that several peer support participants had reconciled with the custodial parent after a long hiatus. One participant put it this way:

> Being able to talk to other guys, everybody exposing their problems . . . I can talk to my wife better than I used to, tell her about how I feel about different things . . . I think it's helped me open up more to her, which has made our relationship better . . . We'd get in arguments when I was out of work . . . We'd be around the house together 24 hours a day and we'd start getting on each other's nerves, drive each other crazy . . . It was getting real tense.

Several participants said their family members had noticed major changes in their personalities since they had joined the group. The Ohio facilitators said that receiving appreciatory phone calls from participants' mothers or other family members was one of the most gratifying parts of their job.

Finally, several participants said their newfound confidence, ability to tame their tempers, and desire to serve as role models for their children had helped motivate them to enter training or education programs, take jobs in the mainstream economy, and pay child support through the system. Without the motivation that peer support provided, many of these men would not have been willing to give employment and training services a chance, and these services would be much less likely to succeed. Other participants might have found jobs, but would have had trouble retaining them or would still have resisted the idea of paying regular child support. As one facilitator put it:

> Peer support gets the men into the right frame of mind in order to go out and get the job skills and then eventually land the job. Because so many guys come in with so much baggage on the front end, if we tried to do pre-employment skills, we'd have guys quitting. They're so angry and so frustrated and have so many things that are a problem in their lives, they need . . . peer support to clear them up.

This suggests that the changes participants describe – increased self-esteem, a greater willingness to solve problems constructively, an expanded notion of their role as fathers – may be prerequisites for success in PFS employment activities and, ultimately, in the labor force.

Perhaps the single most powerful illustration of the potential of this process to change behavior can be seen in Dayton, where a group of peer support participants formed their own organization, Fathers Working With Fathers, which meets independently of the PFS program to advocate for the needs of noncustodial parents. The group has developed a set of bylaws, recruited a Board of Directors (which includes court officials), and is considering forming a small business. Members have met with and testified before state legislators and other elected officials. Many of the group's

members still feel they are treated unfairly by the CSE system, but they have chosen a constructive approach to deal with these concerns.

E. How Peer Support Works

When asked to describe the process by which peer support is able to help people make such profound changes, the participants usually referred to the power and intensity of the group experience. They said that interacting with a group of fathers in similar circumstances helped them see their own behavior in a different light. More than one participant used the analogy of a mirror in describing how peer support forced people to examine themselves. As one participant put it:

> When I sit alone and try to sort out things by myself, I have this tendency to tell myself the exact things I want to hear. But when I sit in a group of people, I have to become open-minded and it allows me to listen to someone else's point of view. I say: "Hey, I never would have told myself that." It challenges me to look at . . . the whole picture . . . If I can just step outside myself for a little while, I can get a better perspective on what course of action I need to take . . . [It's like] a mirror.

Others described a group problem-solving process that helps participants see alternative ways of approaching various issues in their lives. One interviewee said:

> Everybody started opening themselves up to the group. And they were giving input, and another person could give input. And I think it would help the other person. One person may have had a total different outlook or viewpoint on one of the subjects that was brought up, and everybody could put their input into it, and a lot of people changed their minds because of the input that another person gave.

In many groups, the participants developed a common set of norms during early discussions, and then began to impose these norms on resistant group members. This type of peer pressure, which could be quite intense at times, was often apparent when the group dealt with an exercise in the curriculum that involved reacting to a hypothetical scenario; fathers who stated that they would engage in some "negative" behavior in the given situation were chastised by the other members. Facilitators reported numerous situations where group members talked a participant out of a rash action, or talked someone into taking steps to help himself, such as attending Alcoholics Anonymous meetings or obtaining drug treatment.

Finally, both participants and facilitators suggested that the program's ability to help noncustodial parents focus on their children is a key to its success. When PFS participants enter the program, they are typically angry and negative. Most love their children and want the best for them, but these positive feelings are often obscured by intense hostility to the courts, the custodial parents,

and society, all of which seem to be conspiring against them. For many, these feelings of powerlessness are closely related to their perception that racism hinders them at every turn. As a result, many have lost any motivation to give the mainstream economy and society a chance. As one facilitator put it, they are "conditioned to accept the conditions they were in."

The first effect of peer support is to calm the parents' anger and let them know they are not alone: Other noncustodial parents and the facilitators are "on their side." With cooler heads, they may be able to focus more clearly on their strong feelings for their children, and begin to see how their behavior can affect their children's well-being. For example, they may realize they can serve as a positive role model for their children by working steadily. Similarly, with the child as the focus, they may start to see, through discussions with other fathers in similar situations, that there are constructive ways to deal with custodial parents and "the system." They also may begin to understand that child support does affect their children's well-being, and that it is counterproductive to deny this assistance to their children because of a dispute with the custodial parent or because they think they are being treated unfairly by the system. Finally, they may learn concrete information about parenting, child development, and the CSE system that helps them act on these new feelings.

F. The Limitations of Peer Support

While participants and facilitators agreed that peer support can stimulate rapid and profound changes in many participants' outlooks and behavior, all admitted the challenge inherent in making these changes last. Participants spend only a limited amount of time in peer support, and many spend the rest of their lives in hostile environments that do not reinforce the program's message. These negative influences may include friends, neighbors, or family members. As one facilitator put it:

> If you're changing your approach to life, and your family is not ready to make that change themselves, it won't last. You know that old saying: "You go to Rome, you act like a Roman." So, after a while, it can wear off.

Thus, the Tennessee facilitators saw a pressing need for an ongoing support group for peer support graduates. One of them said:

> [During] that five weeks [of peer support], they have their strength because they've got the support of their peers, they've got the staff helping them . . . As long as they're within that five weeks, when they go into their community, they know that there's going to be another day, that they're coming back tomorrow. That's going to give them renewed strength. After that five weeks is up, [they say]: "What do I do now?"

Indeed, several of the New Jersey participants, who were about to complete a peer support cycle when interviewed, seemed concerned that the activity was ending. Several said they wished the group could continue to meet once a week. In Ohio, where participation tended to be open-ended, some

participants continued to attend peer support for months, and seemed reluctant to "let go." One participant, acknowledging the danger of a "relapse," described the following strategy:

> I've explained it [peer support] to my fiancée and she understands it well. I gave her [the facilitator's] card, and just in case I happen to . . . fall back and slip just a little, she can call [the facilitator] and say, "[The participant] is doing such and such, and you need to talk to him at the next meeting because he's not doing what he's supposed to be doing."

Unfortunately, relapses are always possible because, in the final analysis, peer support cannot "solve" many of the problems participants experience. The program may persuade a participant to face up to a legal problem, but he may have no access to an attorney. Another may agree to address his drug problem, but there may be no slots available in residential treatment programs in the community. Still another father may decide he wants to work with the custodial parent to resolve a dispute over visitation in a constructive manner, but the custodial parent may not agree to mediate.

Perhaps most important, even with a strong PFS employment and training component, many of the participants face uphill battles as they confront a labor market that offers few good jobs for men with limited work histories, poor basic skills, and, in many cases, criminal records. It is perhaps not surprising that many of the participants who expressed strong positive feelings about peer support were much less satisfied with the employment and training component. (Of course, it is also important to note that peer support typically required a less intensive time commitment than did employment and training activities, and, as might be expected, was often perceived to be more "fun.")

It is also clear that peer support did not affect all participants. Some fraction of those who entered each group dropped out in the early days, while others stayed in and "went through the motions" but remained largely unaffected. Several of the interviewees noted that "you get out what you're willing to put in" and said that, for some participants, peer support may "plant a seed" but does not stimulate real change because the individual is not ready. Facilitators suggested that some participants were simply too "comfortable" with their current lifestyle, which may have been strongly supported by family members and peers. This is largely consistent with the assumption, discussed earlier, that peer support is intended to help participants build on and act on beliefs and desires that were already important to them when they entered the program. When this basic motivation is missing, it may be quite difficult for the program to generate real change.

This also may explain why, for some participants, even peer support could not soften their hostility to the CSE system. Although they may have become more sympathetic to the notion of providing financial support – and, in some cases, better able to understand the system – several

interviewees still saw the enforcement system as fundamentally unfair to noncustodial parents. For some successful participants, another piece of evidence for this case came when they got jobs and began to have child support withheld from their paychecks. After deductions, their net pay was, in their view, grossly insufficient to support themselves and their new families.[19] Some suggested that the best option might be to return to the underground economy and make direct child support payments. When asked if he intended to stay employed, given the size of his take-home pay, one participant said:

> It's hard to say. It's a dead end. It doesn't give you any incentive to do any better. Because the more you make, the more they take. There's going to have to be a stop because it's not giving the guys no incentive. I'd rather just go in f—ing debt the rest of my life, [and then say]: "F— you, I'm dead – now, who's gonna get it?" The welfare system still didn't get that money from me.

It was also clear that, even after completing peer support, many of the interviewees still did not acknowledge the link between their own failure to pay child support and the fact that their children were receiving welfare. Thus, they did not accept the legitimacy of the state's efforts to collect reimbursement for welfare expenditures, and did not see how paying child support through the system could help their children. These parents saw the need to support their children, but still preferred to make direct payments, reasoning that these would do most to help their children. One noncustodial parent explained his view of welfare:

> Welfare wasn't created because fathers were making babies and they weren't taking care of them . . . Welfare was created because everyone in the United States didn't have a job and people needed to be taken care of . . . and the people made it the government's responsibility to take care of them.

Another said:

> I knew my children would always be taken care of as long as she was receiving assistance. I paid my taxes through the years; that's what welfare is for.

This may be another situation in which there was no strong groundwork on which to build. It would be difficult in the best of circumstances to persuade a noncustodial parent that the best way to

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[19]The guidelines used by states to calculate child support orders generally consider the noncustodial parent's income in setting the award. Some take a flat percentage of income at all levels. However, in some states, the percentage of income withheld for child support is not flat, and in fact tends to be highest for people earning approximately $10,000 a year. In addition, some of these participants' orders may have been set during periods in the past when they were earning higher salaries, and were never adjusted to reflect their new, lower earnings. Finally, some participants owed child support for several children in more than one household; the size of the order in such a situation may be quite high relative to a low-wage job.

improve his children's well-being is to send child support payments to the welfare department, which will then retain most of what he has paid. This task was doubly hard when the parent, perhaps coming from a family or community where public assistance receipt is quite common, did not enter the program with a strong aversion to welfare. Without such a foundation, peer support's success in this area may be limited.

Nevertheless, on the positive side, a few of the interviewees said they had learned more about the CSE system. One said he now understood the need to "reimburse" the state for its welfare expenditures, and another said a key goal of PFS was to help participants stop being "a burden on the system." Others, including some of those quoted earlier, still did not approve of the CSE system, but said they were now willing to pay support through formal channels because they understood that resistance would create problems for their children. Some have argued that this is in fact the most important outcome: Parents do not need to like paying child support to the state – just as most people do not like paying taxes – but they must be willing to do so despite their negative feelings. Several interviewees admitted that the presence of the PFS program suggested that the system was starting to take their concerns more seriously, and wondered why such a program had not existed before. Finally, the development of an organization such as Fathers Working With Fathers in Dayton suggests that some noncustodial parents were dealing with their concerns about child support in a more constructive way.

IV. Conclusions

Peer support has earned a place in the PFS model during Phase II of the demonstration. The component was successful in almost every site, and proved extremely valuable in binding participants to the PFS program. In some sites, particularly those where the employment and training component was less intensive, peer support literally became the core of PFS.

It also seems clear that peer support changed the outlooks and behavior of many participants. Although it is difficult to tell whether they will last, these changes appear to be prerequisites to success in the employment and training component and the labor market, and are necessary if the program hopes to generate an increase in formal child support payments. Finally, in several sites, peer support helped bring the PFS partner agencies together. By attending sessions and listening to the participants speak openly about their feelings, staff from different agencies learned a great deal about the men and began to understand some of their frustrations. In a few sites, positive publicity generated by peer support may even be helping to change broader community views of noncustodial parents.

CHAPTER 6

ENHANCED CHILD SUPPORT ENFORCEMENT

The set of activities that PFS pilot sites were required to carry out in the enhanced child support enforcement component went beyond the typical practices of the CSE system in several ways to accomplish two major goals: (1) make the job training bargain of PFS real by enforcing noncustodial parents' unique obligation under PFS to *either* work and pay child support or participate in PFS job training and peer support activities in preparation for work and child support responsibilities; and (2) create for the PFS population a "responsive" CSE system that tracks their obligations to their current economic circumstances – both when they are unemployed and when they succeed in finding work – and is tailored to the long-term goal of improving the earning power and child support potential of poor fathers.

Because the CSE system is exceptionally diverse, each of the pilot sites started from a different point and created its own definition of the enhanced CSE component. Nevertheless, most of the sites made important progress in enhancing their CSE systems for PFS. They developed new staffing and case-processing approaches to facilitate "working" previously unworked cases; designed new procedures to temporarily reduce noncustodial parents' support obligations while they participated in PFS and to raise them again when the parents found employment or failed to attend program activities; and devised a number of strategies to expedite the CSE process for PFS cases. These new approaches played an important role in the overall performance of the pilot programs and may suggest some lessons for the national CSE system.

This chapter first provides some context by defining enhanced child support enforcement in PFS and briefly describing how the child support system normally works. (Further information is presented in Appendix A.) It then turns to the pilot sites, describing the child support characteristics of the noncustodial parents and the institutional and statutory context for PFS in the sites. The final sections describe how sites implemented the enhanced CSE component, and point to key questions from this experience for the demonstration's Phase II and for national child support policy.

I. The Role of Enhanced Child Support Enforcement in PFS

Enhanced child support enforcement was perhaps the least clearly defined of the four core PFS components, largely because CSE programs vary so much from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. Rather

than detailing a specific set of required activities, MDRC outlined the objectives of the component and gave the sites examples of steps that might be needed to achieve these goals. This section briefly defines enhanced child support enforcement, and then provides some important contextual information about the national CSE system that will help readers understand why this component was seen as necessary.

A. What Is Enhanced Child Support Enforcement?

Enhanced child support enforcement was envisioned as a targeted approach that would devote more resources and attention to the noncustodial parents of AFDC children than is usual in the IV-D system,[1] where high caseloads for workers can lead to cases "falling through the cracks" or receiving low priority, especially if custodial parents do not complain about nonpayment and noncustodial parents are believed to be unemployed. Enhancements of typical CSE practices were also designed to address some of the equity and fairness issues that low-income fathers say stand in the way of fulfilling their obligations.

Specifically, the enhanced CSE component called on IV-D agencies in the pilot sites to enhance their usual procedures by:

- **Reallocating their resources** to identify potential PFS participants from among their cases, screen and refer these parents for program services, and work PFS cases on a priority basis.

- **Expediting their normal case-processing procedures** to establish paternity within three months for PFS enrollees whose paternity was not already established, issue child support orders rapidly for participants who had no previous order, and modify child support orders quickly (lowering them while the noncustodial parent was in the program and raising them when he began earning money).

- **Enforcing orders** for noncustodial parents who were able to pay but were not paying.[2]

These recommended measures are generally consistent with the objectives of local CSE programs and the federal guidelines that govern the IV-D system. However, resource constraints and other factors discussed below make it difficult for many CSE agencies to meet these goals in practice.

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[1]As noted in Chapter 1, the CSE system is commonly referred to as the "IV-D system" because the federal child support enforcement program was created in Title IV-D of the Social Security Act in 1975.

[2]This description is summarized from a technical assistance manual prepared for the PFS pilot sites: Kastner, Corriveau, and Bayse, 1991.

In essence, PFS asked the sites to ensure that PFS cases were handled according to the standards these agencies hoped to – but often could not – apply to their entire caseloads.

B. CSE Policy and Practice: The PFS Context

CSE activities across the country are governed not only by the set of federal statutes and implementing regulations that constitute the IV-D system,[3] but also by a welter of state and local laws – including statutes, case law, and court rules – addressing welfare and public aid, domestic relations, and civil and criminal procedure. These state and local standards are often much older than, and sometimes inconsistent with, federal child support policy. As a result, CSE practices, and the institutions that are involved in overseeing and operating the CSE system, vary a great deal from state to state and locality to locality. Nevertheless, federal laws and regulations set procedural benchmarks and performance standards for the CSE system and thus define, in important ways, how the system is *supposed* to operate.

As noted earlier, differences between the federal goals and the ways CSE programs *actually* perform partly motivated MDRC's articulation of "enhancements" for the PFS model. For example, the enhanced CSE component was meant to enable sites to meet, for their PFS-related cases, federal standards for timely processing of cases – goals that apply to states' entire IV-D caseloads, but were not typically being achieved.

PFS enhancements were also designed to address IV-D case-processing problems that are rooted in the life circumstances of low-income men. A significant segment of noncustodial parents whose children receive welfare are not connected to the societal institutions that make it easy for government agencies to identify and locate them – jobs, the income tax system, the Unemployment Insurance system, public assistance programs, motor vehicle or professional licensing and registration systems, and so forth. For these parents, both the federal framework for the IV-D program and the variety of state and local CSE practices have proven relatively ineffective. As background for a later discussion of specific PFS innovations that addressed these issues, this section also describes the features of the federal IV-D framework that most affect low-income parents.

Federal IV-D policy is founded on the goals of enforcing parents' responsibility for the financial support of their children and preventing welfare dependency. These goals have been translated into statutes and regulations that are generally designed to ensure consistent, adequate child support awards

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[3]Only cases in which AFDC is provided or the custodial parent requests IV-D services are required by federal law to be included in the IV-D system. The proportion of all child support cases covered by the IV-D program varies from state to state.

and a standardized approach to enforcement in the event of nonpayment. Accordingly, federal policy has emphasized: (1) basing child support obligations primarily on noncustodial parents' ability to pay; (2) "working" all child support cases to the extent possible (and not giving priority to some on the basis of current income or potential for compliance); and (3) expeditiously performing child support functions, including both paternity and child support establishment and enforcement of orders.

1. **Child Support Obligations Based on Ability to Pay.** The ability-to-pay principle is primarily reflected in laws requiring states to adopt and use income-based criteria – called "child support guidelines" – in determining the financial obligations of noncustodial parents.[4] State guidelines vary in a number of ways, many of which are relevant to low-income noncustodial parents. For example, a few states' guidelines make an allowance for parents' subsistence before calculating child support obligations based on the remaining income. Most states have criteria for setting minimum child support order amounts when parents' income falls below a threshold. Also, some states make parents liable, regardless of their ability to pay, for cash assistance, medical services, foster care, or other services. States also have differing criteria for changing or "modifying" child support obligations when parents' circumstances change.

Finally, in many states, "ability to pay" does not depend solely on the noncustodial parent's present financial situation. For example, when the person owing child support is unemployed, state guidelines may direct the decisionmaker to consider the parent's earning *potential* (as measured, for example, by his previous earnings or education), rather than his current income, in calculating his child support order (or determining whether a modification is required). These guidelines reflect a view that unemployment does not relieve a noncustodial parent of his obligation to pay child support, and are designed in part to induce these parents to find a new job as quickly as possible. Obviously, application of these guidelines may create situations in which noncustodial parents are expected to pay child support during periods when they have no income.

2. **Working All Child Support Cases.** To encourage state CSE programs to "work all cases," federal child support laws and regulations contain a set of rewards and penalties for states. For example, the federal government pays 66 percent of the costs of most IV-D services and 90 percent of the cost of developing computerized information systems and the genetic tests required for paternity establishment in contested cases. In addition, states keep most of the money they collect in

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[4]Amendments to Title IV-D, passed in 1984, required all states to develop such guidelines. The Family Support Act of 1988 elevated the legal status of guidelines to a "rebuttable presumption" requiring written explanations for child support orders that deviate from the guidelines.

AFDC cases, and they receive incentive payments for all AFDC collections and for some non-AFDC collections (up to a cap).

These financial inducements to provide CSE program services are accompanied by federal IV-D program performance standards that set maximum time frames for each step in processing CSE cases, from the point of referral (or application) to the IV-D agency through periodic attempts to locate non-payers for enforcement and distribution of collected child support. States are also required to meet quantitative goals for increasing paternity establishment lest they jeopardize their federal IV-D and AFDC funding.

Despite the incentives and standards, only some absent fathers are identified and actively pursued in order to legally establish paternity (if that has not already been done); only some noncustodial parents without child support orders are located and engaged in this process; and only some parents with legally established obligations who do not pay are sought and compelled to pay using a variety of enforcement techniques, possibly even jail sentences. One explanation is the dramatic growth in the volume of cases needing child support services[5] and caseloads per worker that sometimes number in the thousands.[6]

The IV-D system is slow to work some cases, particularly AFDC cases, because the economic circumstances and lifestyles of noncustodial parents hamper CSE efforts, and there are few incentives for either parent to cooperate.[7] CSE workers must rely on the single parents applying for AFDC to provide at least the name and address of their children's other parent(s). The workers then "look" for noncustodial parents by trying to send them mail and by searching various computerized record systems, including state motor vehicle department records, tax records, employer records for Unemployment Insurance and wage reporting, and credit bureau records. With accurate identifying

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[5]The number of children under age 18 living with only one parent increased from about 5.3 million in 1970 to about 11 million in 1992, which was a rise from 9 percent of all children under 18 to 21 percent. (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1993, p. 64.) The number of paternity and child support establishments accomplished by state IV-D programs, and the amount of child support collected, has also grown – for example, from total collections of a little over $1 billion in federal fiscal year 1978 to almost $7 billion in 1991. However, because of the growth in the number of single-parent families, the percentage of families "demographically eligible" to actually receive child support payments stayed almost constant, rising from 35 percent in 1978 to 37 percent in 1989. See U.S. Congress, House Committee on Ways and Means, 1993, p. 743.

[6]Although the states, collectively, make more from the IV-D program than they spend to administer it, they are not required to invest these "profits" in the CSE program. Thus, even a CSE program that generates revenue for a state may be "underfunded" from a CSE manager's perspective.

[7]For an in-depth examination of case-processing methods and barriers to success in two counties of a large state, see Bloom, 1993.

information, these methods make it relatively easy to locate people who work in the mainstream economy and live continuously at the same address.[8]

When noncustodial parents have unstable living arrangements and sporadic or "off the books" jobs, these CSE tasks are daunting. Parents in these circumstances are difficult to "find" because CSE workers do not actually leave their offices to search, and the computerized records lag the movements of people by several months at best. Because locating the noncustodial parent is the very first step in the CSE process that culminates in payment of child support, if this does not occur, the probability of payment is zero.

When noncustodial parents with unstable lifestyles do not want to be found, or custodial parent partners do not provide useable information to help locate them, their child support cases often turn out to be workable only if an unpredictable event brings the noncustodial parents to the attention of the CSE workers. This can happen when a periodic search of computerized records "hits" on a sought-after CSE case or when a noncustodial parent is arrested for an unrelated offense. However, the nonpaying parents in difficult CSE cases have to be found again and again. When each CSE worker is responsible for several hundred to a few thousand cases, triage (that is, strategies for allocating scarce resources where they are most needed) becomes the dominant approach to handling the workload, and cases in which there are no leads for location are simply not worked.

3. **Expeditious Case-Processing.** Program standards adopted in response to the Family Support Act of 1988 defined time frames for each major step in opening and working child support cases and required states to meet these time frame standards in 75 percent of cases. To comply, states are installing automated CSE case record systems, and many are moving parts of the child support system out of overcrowded courts by adopting nonjudicial or quasi-judicial forums to hear evidence and decide child support cases. Many have also adopted consent procedures that allow noncustodial parents to legally acknowledge that they are the fathers of their children and agree to a child support award without being served with a complaint by a public attorney or prosecutor and without having to appear in court as a defendant.

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[8]Even when parents are easily located, the steps required to establish paternity and/or child support and enforce support orders are time-consuming and complicated. Other agencies (in addition to the CSE agency) play vital roles in the establishment and enforcement process, and working cases ultimately might entail public attorneys' filing the necessary legal complaints against noncustodial parents, court administrators docketing cases for hearings, service of process (personally delivering official papers) by a sheriff or other designated officer of the court, and confirmation from AFDC staff at the time of a hearing that the custodial parent is receiving public assistance.

C. A Case Scenario

The combination of noncooperation by noncustodial parents with little ability to pay child support, state and local laws that hold noncustodial parents financially responsible for public assistance provided to their children, and bureaucratic complexities and large caseloads that slow progress on difficult cases can result in large child support debts for poor men. The hypothetical scenario presented in the box describes how this may have happened for many of the noncustodial parents referred to PFS.

II. Starting Points for Enhanced Child Support Enforcement in the PFS Sites

As noted earlier, each PFS site started the pilot phase with a distinct CSE organizational structure, different state laws governing child support, and a variety of local CSE practices. Partly as a result of these factors, the CSE characteristics of the PFS target group also varied from site to site. This section describes circumstances in the pilot sites with respect to child support enforcement as a prelude to the later discussion of the specific steps they took to enhance their CSE systems.

A. A CSE Profile of the Noncustodial Parents

One important factor in understanding the CSE enhancements adopted during the pilot phase is the CSE characteristics of the noncustodial parents targeted by PFS – their ability to pay support, their child support obligations, and their recent payment patterns.

1. Low Ability to Pay. As detailed in Chapter 3, the noncustodial parents referred to the PFS pilot programs were not only unemployed, but, on average, were also disadvantaged with respect to their ability to work, earn, and pay child support. To be sure, the noncustodial parents had strong incentives to underreport their employment and earnings at the point they were referred to PFS, which was usually when they were making a court appearance to explain their failure to pay child support. However, their answers to other, less threatening questions about their situations also pointed in the direction of poverty, low skills, barriers to employment, and sporadic income.

2. Substantial Obligations. In spite of their apparently poor employment records and job prospects, the group referred to PFS had acquired substantial child support obligations. As shown in Table 6.1, of the parents who had child support orders at the time they were referred to PFS, almost 30 percent had orders for $150 or more per month (per child). The overall average amount of child support orders was $122.04 per month per child. The child support and related public assistance debts (or amounts in arrears), as shown in Table 6.2, were also high: Seventy-four percent had debts of

An Example of How the CSE Process Often Deals with Low-Income Noncustodial Parents

- A woman becomes pregnant, has no medical insurance, and applies for AFDC.
- The welfare agency obtains from her the name and address of the father, initiates a paternity action, and "bills" the hospital charges for the birth and ongoing AFDC costs to an account for the noncustodial parent awaiting paternity establishment.
- The paternity complaint is filed, and the alleged father is notified of a hearing date.
- He fails to appear at the hearing, and the prosecutor or public attorney recommends a default judgment on the paternity action* and establishment of a support order based on an imputed earnings amount (for example, the minimum hourly wage rate for a 40-hour work week).
- The judge or hearing officer finds the absent parent in default, and sets a support amount based on the state's guideline amount for the imputed earnings, resulting in an order for ongoing support and requiring additional payments for the accrued "state debt" (that is, the hospital charges and AFDC costs).
- Attorney fees and possibly other court costs and IV-D collection fees are added to the noncustodial parent's account (the child is about six months old at this point).
- The IV-D agency initiates action to locate the absent parent and begin collection by sending the noncustodial parent a notice, using the address given by the mother.
- He does not respond and, over several months of nonresponse, the enforcement process escalates.
- A bench warrant is issued, and the noncustodial parent is picked up and arraigned.
- He appears in court (it is now about a year after the child was born), facing a debt of thousands of dollars, which consists of state debt (which could theoretically be settled for a lesser amount), court-ordered child support (which cannot be retroactively modified), and fees and interest (which are subject to varying adjustment policies).
- Although the noncustodial parent claims that he is unemployed and has been unemployed for a year, the prosecutor or public attorney is not disposed to settle because the parent has not been cooperative.
- The judge does not make any changes in the existing support award and orders the noncustodial parent to seek work.

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*When an alleged father is notified about a paternity hearing and fails to appear, he may be declared to be the child's father "by default."

TABLE 6.1

STATUS OF CHILD SUPPORT ORDERS AT REFERRAL FOR NONCUSTODIAL PARENTS REFERRED TO PARENTS' FAIR SHARE

Status and Sample	Alabama	Florida	Massa-chusetts	Michigan	Minnesota Anoka	Minnesota Dakota	Missouri	New Jersey	Ohio Butler	Ohio Mont.	Tennessee	All Sites
All noncustodial parents referred to PFS												
Had child support order (%)	100.0	92.3	100.0	100.0	97.6	100.0	80.7	50.0	90.6	62.8	100.0	87.7
No child support order (%)	0.0	7.7	0.0	0.0	2.4	0.0	19.4	50.0	9.4	37.2	0.0	12.3
Sample size	29	26	35	98	41	27	31	46	32	78	78	521
Noncustodial parents who had a child support order at referral												
Monthly obligation (%)												
$0	0.0	50.0	28.6	3.2	15.0	34.8	0.0	5.9	0.0	0.0	0.0	8.5
Less than or equal to $50	13.3	0.0	14.3	2.2	15.0	13.0	4.6	5.9	8.0	32.7	10.5	10.8
$50.01 - $74.99	33.3	5.0	7.1	7.5	25.0	4.4	0.0	5.9	4.0	10.2	18.4	10.8
$75 - $99.99	20.0	20.0	7.1	5.4	10.0	13.0	4.6	17.7	44.0	20.4	15.8	14.4
$100 - $149.99	20.0	15.0	14.3	22.6	20.0	17.4	72.7	17.7	16.0	26.5	43.4	27.8
$150 - $199.99	6.7	10.0	14.3	20.4	10.0	8.7	9.1	17.7	20.0	8.2	10.5	13.4
$200 or more	6.7	0.0	14.3	38.7	5.0	8.7	9.1	29.4	8.0	2.0	1.3	14.2
Average child support order ($)	104.94	54.00	91.47	193.41	88.28	75.07	129.61	152.77	116.24	48.30	105.86	122.04
Sample size	15	20	28	93	20	23	22	17	25	49	76	388

SOURCE: MDRC review of child support casefiles for a subsample of noncustodial parents referred to Parents' Fair Share through November 1992.

NOTES: Child support order amounts listed are monthly amounts per child.
The percentages in the bottom panel do not include noncustodial parents who were missing child support amount information.

TABLE 6.2

STATUS OF CHILD SUPPORT ARREARS AT REFERRAL FOR NONCUSTODIAL PARENTS REFERRED TO PARENTS' FAIR SHARE

Status	Alabama	Florida	Massa-chusetts	Michigan	Minnesota Anoka	Minnesota Dakota	Missouri	New Jersey	Ohio Butler	Ohio Mont.	Tennessee	All Sites
Amount of arrears (%)												
$0	3.4	2.4	8.1	6.8	3.2	10.7	54.6	2.8	16.2	2.7	0.3	8.6
Less than $1,000	19.3	4.8	14.9	12.5	19.2	13.3	13.6	18.6	17.7	26.7	18.0	17.1
$1,000 - $2,499	44.3	21.4	23.0	17.9	18.1	25.3	12.1	25.5	25.0	23.6	31.0	23.5
$2,500 - $4,999	21.6	28.6	20.3	22.1	24.5	21.3	9.9	22.8	20.6	21.3	28.2	22.2
$5,000 - $9,999	6.8	33.3	25.7	22.8	20.2	20.0	6.1	17.2	14.7	13.6	16.3	17.5
$10,000 or more	4.6	9.5	8.1	17.9	14.9	9.3	3.8	13.1	5.9	12.0	6.1	11.1
Average arrearage amount ($)	2,860.78	4,385.58	3,967.05	5,668.67	5,321.46	3,910.61	1,541.52	4,402.24	2,990.28	4,572.81	3,574.88	4,252.59
Sample size	88	42	74	425	94	75	132	145	68	258	294	1,695

SOURCE: MDRC calculations from Background Information Form.

NOTES: Percentages do not include noncustodial parents who were missing arrears information.
Distributions may not add up to 100.0 percent because of rounding.

$1,000 or more, and 29 percent had accumulated arrearages of $5,000 or more. The average child support arrearage was $4,253.[9]

The disparity between the PFS enrollees' apparently limited ability to pay child support and the magnitude of their child support obligations and debts suggests that a responsive, enhanced CSE system would initially have to find ways to lower the amount of child support they were required to pay. As described in the next section, developing procedures to make temporary downward adjustments in child support obligations was an important CSE enhancement in four sites.

The employment disadvantages of a major segment of the PFS population suggest that even those men who succeeded in landing jobs would be unlikely to earn enough to have much discretionary income; thus, responsiveness would also mean quickly establishing child support payment as a routine, non-discretionary expense via immediate withholding by employers from the parents' paychecks. As described below, most PFS sites were able to accomplish this for program participants who found work.

3. **Child Support Payments Before and After Referral to PFS.** What did PFS parents actually pay in child support before and during the first few months after they were referred to the program? Data collected from IV-D system records on a subsample of the PFS population, shown in Table 6.3, indicate that the parents referred to the program paid an average of $22.95 per month per child during the four-month period just before they entered PFS, with the payments ranging from $4.50 in Tennessee to $55.20 in Massachusetts. Excluding from the calculations those who paid no child support (64 percent of the sample for the Table 6.3 analysis), the average child support payment was $63.80 per month per child.

In the four-month period *after* referral to the program, the average payments made by the same subsample of PFS parents decreased in some sites and increased in others, resulting in almost no change in the all-site average (see Table 6.3). During this period, the subsample paid an average of $22.62 per month per child. Excluding those who paid nothing in the pre-referral period, the all-site average for the post-referral period was $62.89 per month per child. This almost exactly matched the pre-referral figure, again reflecting wide variation across the sites, with changes in both directions from the pre-referral to the early post-referral period.

MDRC did not necessarily expect to find a consistent pattern in payments across sites from

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[9]A noncustodial parent with a monthly child support obligation of $100 per child for two children could easily build up such a debt in a year of unemployment if he had also been determined responsible for birth-related medical expenses ("confinement costs").

TABLE 6.3

STATUS OF MONTHLY CHILD SUPPORT PAYMENTS BEFORE AND AFTER REFERRAL BY NONCUSTODIAL PARENTS REFERRED TO PARENTS' FAIR SHARE

Sample	Alabama	Florida	Massa-chusetts	Michigan	Minnesota		Missouri	New Jersey	Ohio		Tennessee	All Sites
					Anoka	Dakota			Butler	Mont.		
All noncustodial parents referred to PFS (a)												
Four-month pre-referral average ($)	21.70	44.34	55.20	28.46	14.44	1.74	27.45	7.41	11.58	22.28	4.50	22.95
Four-month post-referral average ($)	21.92	38.08	23.00	25.81	32.70	12.18	22.68	8.52	34.76	25.00	8.86	22.62
Sample size	72	120	132	358	90	57	84	110	76	243	237	1,579
Noncustodial parents who made a payment (b)												
Four-month pre-referral average ($)	37.21	104.34	142.86	62.13	59.07	9.00	85.38	47.97	22.56	66.01	17.21	63.80
Four-month post-referral average ($)	37.58	89.61	59.54	56.35	133.79	63.14	70.57	55.14	67.73	74.08	33.88	62.89
Sample size	42	51	51	164	22	11	27	17	39	82	62	568

SOURCE: MDRC calculations from child support payment data obtained from PFS pilot sites.

NOTES: This sample includes all noncustodial parents referred to Parents' Fair Share for whom at least four months of child support payment data were available in the four months prior to and the four months after referral.

Child support payment amounts listed are monthly amounts per child.

(a) Dollar averages include zero values for those sample members who made no child support payments.

(b) Dollar averages include only those sample members who made a child support payment in the four months prior to referral.

immediately before referral to immediately after for this brief pilot phase period – especially given substantial differences in local CSE practices and in the approaches sites took to creating responsive CSE systems. For example, as outlined in the next section, some sites adopted procedures to reduce support obligations in the immediate post-referral period, while others started with minimum child support orders for most PFS cases and made upward adjustments as the parents found employment. Additional influences on short-term payment patterns included: differences in the employability characteristics of the sites' noncustodial parents; more or less active job markets; wage rate differences across sites; and different program designs that led to variations in the length of time PFS enrollees spent in education and job training (and, thus, out of the labor market).

B. The Institutional and Statutory Context

Echoing the hallmark variation in CSE policies and practices across the country, the PFS pilot sites started developing enhanced CSE components under widely varying conditions.

1. The Previous Experience and Organizational Structure of the CSE Programs. The Florida, Massachusetts, and Michigan sites provide useful examples of the diversity in previous experience and organizational structure that characterized the PFS sites. For example, the Florida and Michigan sites had experimented with using the CSE agency as the "front door" to court-ordered job search programs for unemployed absent parents, and thus already had in place some procedures to identify and work nonpaying AFDC cases even if the noncustodial parents had no known source of income. However, before joining the demonstration, neither of these sites had policies and practices to routinely adjust the child support obligations of unemployed noncustodial parents to their immediate ability to pay.

In the Massachusetts site, judges usually set child support orders in AFDC cases at the minimum of $50 per month for noncustodial parents who were jobless at the time of a hearing for support establishment, but then the IV-D agency gave second-order priority to enforcement for nonpayment in such cases. In other PFS sites, the child support cases of nonpayers with no evidence of employment were worked only by sending "seek work" orders in the mail (a Montgomery County, Ohio, practice) or by checking the computer matches of CSE cases with Unemployment Insurance beneficiaries and employees covered by the Unemployment Insurance wage-reporting system.

These examples reflect differences in philosophy, statutes, and operational environments. In the Michigan site (Kent County, which includes Grand Rapids), the prevailing view of men who were not keeping up with their child support was that almost all could work – especially if they regularly

attended and took advantage of job search services – and, therefore, that they should pay. While the state's child support guidelines provided for a minimum child support order in no-income cases (not less than $5 per week for one child), this standard was rarely applied; instead, the state's median income was imputed to unemployed noncustodial parents according to a provision of the guidelines that called unemployment an "unexercised ability to earn." Furthermore, Kent County had a reputation for high-performance child support enforcement[10] and a concomitant willingness to use all available enforcement methods to induce those who owed child support to pay, including jail sentences.[11] To build an enhanced CSE component for PFS, this site – one of the most "hard-nosed" with respect to enforcement – was asked, in effect, to broaden its repertoire by adding incentives for the most disadvantaged unemployed noncustodial parents to cooperate.

In the Florida site, the efficiency of the enforcement side of the CSE system was a prime focus when the PFS pilot program began implementation. Although working no-income cases was a well-established practice prior to PFS – because absent parents found to be unemployed could be referred to a supervised job search activity – child support orders were rarely modified either upward or downward (the state's guidelines specify that unemployment is a "frivolous" basis for adjusting orders). Jail sentences for nonpayers of child support were relatively common.

These policies were highly relevant to the question of whether Florida's PFS consortium would succeed in implementing a responsive CSE system for PFS, but perhaps more important were major organizational and logistical challenges the IV-D system faced in moving cases through the enforcement process: In Florida's Region IV CSE district, which Duval County's caseload dominated, 20 District Court judges heard child support cases, and those cases could be assigned to any one of more than 200 CSE staff. CSE officials were more interested in ensuring that men who failed to comply with referrals to job search did not "fall through the cracks" of the CSE system; they were not as enthusiastic about adjusting child support orders of PFS participants because this would generate

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[10]By the standard of total dollars of child support collected – one of the usual measures of IV-D agency performance – this site, a county, ranked ahead of 24 states in 1990. (For 1990 state collections data, see U.S. Congress, House Committee on Ways and Means, 1991.) The county's ratio of total child support collected to IV-D administrative costs in 1990 was 10.54:1, which placed it ahead of all 50 states.

[11]Based on field observations, it was clear that Alabama, Florida, and Tennessee were the sites most likely to impose a jail sentence for failure to pay court-ordered child support. Most of the others used this method of enforcement only rarely prior to the start-up of PFS. Ironically, the Michigan site's CSE officials wanted to have jail sentences as an option for their PFS program, but during the year or so before the pilot phase and during most of the pilot phase itself, the Kent County jails were so overcrowded that jail space was rented in a nearby county and the facilities were not usually available for child support enforcement.

increased case activity in an already overextended system.

Owing to similar pressures, the CSE environment in Massachusetts was not favorable for the state's IV-D agency, the Department of Revenue, to consider using more of their resources to work no-income cases. The state's child support guidelines for imputing income place the burden on the courts to determine whether a person who owes child support and claims to be unemployed is capable of working (or is working but could work more or earn more); thus, the courts routinely establish minimum child support orders for noncustodial parents who claim to be unemployed unless the IV-D agency has evidence to the contrary. When the PFS pilot phase began, the Department of Revenue was under considerable pressure to improve its collections performance in AFDC cases as a state cost-cutting strategy. Thus, the PFS challenge for the IV-D agency in this site was to identify PFS-eligible individuals and process their cases expeditiously while achieving productivity increases across the board. In addition, both Florida and Massachusetts experienced major CSE reorganizations during the pilot phase, which placed additional stress on these systems' ability to create an enhanced CSE environment. In both sites, IV-D cases were shifted to specific courts or judges in response to difficulties in managing these cases.

Similar portraits of the CSE conditions in the other six pilot sites would highlight the importance of state and local leaders' policy preferences, customary practices, bureaucratic politics and personalities, and community and agency cultures, rather than particular statutory dictates or constraints. The pilot experience revealed a few clear statutory barriers to fully implementing the PFS vision of responsive child support enforcement (to be detailed below), but, in the main, the institutional conditions under which the nine sites started to build enhanced CSE components proved amenable to change over time – just not amenable to change by a single approach.

More of a challenge to successful implementation of the enhanced CSE component was the sheer complexity of the IV-D programs and the resulting difficulty in changing CSE operations. Child support enforcement involves numerous agencies across the judicial, executive, and legislative branches of federal, state, and local governments; typically, sites had to work with the local welfare agency, a local public attorney or prosecuting attorney, a court administration agency, one or more courts (usually a district and/or probate court), process servers from a marshall's, sheriff's, or other court officer agency, and the local CSE administrative agency.

2. **Child Support Guidelines.** The nine states' child support guidelines (summarized in Appendix B) constituted one of the few statutory constraints on PFS sites' ability to enhance local CSE practice because they precisely define what "ability to pay" child support means in each state.

For the typical noncustodial parent referred to PFS – unemployed and with one or two children – the child support guidelines in the pilot phase states theoretically could have produced a minimum child support order ranging from zero to $50 per month for one child. All of the PFS states except Missouri have threshold income levels for noncustodial parents below which judges or other decisionmakers in support cases are allowed to set minimum orders on a case-by-case basis corresponding with the parents' ability to pay.[12]

As described above, data collected on the amount of child support obligations of parents referred to PFS (see Table 6.1) suggest that, prior to PFS, most sites did not consistently use provisions of state child support guidelines that allow minimum orders when those owing child support have minimal or no income.[13] Two PFS sites found that their states' child support guidelines presented problems for adjusting noncustodial parents' orders down to a minimum. Missouri's guidelines, as noted above, do not incorporate a threshold income level below which a minimum order is considered. Instead, child support orders are set based on a percentage of parents' income. Parents with incomes as low as $100 per month must pay a percentage-based amount; at this level, the state's guidelines produce obligations of $24 per month for one child and $37 for two children.[14] To implement PFS, Missouri established a procedure to set support at $50 per month, deviating from the guidelines for PFS cases.

When PFS began, Ohio's child support guidelines contained an unusual combination of restrictions on adjusting orders downward to the minimum. Noncustodial parents must have earned less than $6,000 in a year *and* have been unemployed for at least three months to qualify for a minimum order; otherwise, judges were required to formally deviate from child support guidelines (that is, make a written finding) in order to set child support at the minimum. However, because few of the noncustodial parents referred to PFS in the two Ohio programs reported being unemployed for less than three months – 7 and 9 percent, or approximately the same as in other sites – it is not clear

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[12]These threshold income amounts range from about $400 to $870 gross income per month, except Tennessee's, which is $100 gross income per month. Some states specify the amount of the minimum order. For example, in Massachusetts, it is not less than $50 per month (or per AFDC case, in order to provide for a pass-through of payment to welfare families), and in New Jersey, the minimum must be a specific amount between $5 and $10 per week. Ohio recently adopted a statewide minimum order amount of $50 per month, but judges may order less than that in certain circumstances. In other states, the minimum amount is not specified. For example, in Alabama, judges may set the minimum at their discretion. In Minnesota, judges may order community service for parents who owe child support but are unable to contribute any.

[13]Some unemployed noncustodial parents may have had income from Unemployment Insurance benefits or other sources that enabled them to continue to pay child support.

[14]Tennessee's very low threshold income level has a similar effect: At $100 per month gross income, Tennessee's guidelines call for noncustodial parents to pay 21 percent of income for support of one child.

whether the state's guidelines would have been a real constraint if Ohio had adopted a policy of adjusting child support orders to the minimum during PFS participants' involvement in the program. In Montgomery County, Ohio, a major court frequently did not set any child support orders for unemployed noncustodial parents before PFS began and, instead, issued seek-work orders for them.

Two additional features of the child support guidelines governing the PFS sites can affect the amount that noncustodial parents are required to pay. First, the guidelines for each of the nine PFS pilot states allow judges or other decisionmakers to impute income in certain circumstances – that is, to make an assumption about parents' earnings or earning capacity. This is permitted to discourage noncustodial parents from either quitting jobs or failing to provide income information in order to avoid child support obligations. Thus, income is imputed most often when a noncustodial parent is considered voluntarily unemployed or underemployed or does not appear for a hearing to establish support. Ohio's guidelines for imputing income, which are similar to other states', take into consideration the parent's employment potential and probable earnings based on his or her recent work history and occupational qualifications, and the prevailing job opportunities and salary levels in the community in which the parent resides. These provisions for imputing income effectively give judges and other child support decisionmakers discretion to choose between a minimum order and an income-based order for unemployed noncustodial parents.

Second, some states' guidelines allow for in-kind support by noncustodial parents (in lieu of cash). The guidelines in Missouri, New Jersey, and Ohio allow courts to consider such support, which may result in child support orders below the guidelines amounts, whereas Minnesota's guidelines specifically prohibit this practice. (Alabama's, Florida's, Massachusetts', and Michigan's guidelines do not address in-kind support.)

How much were PFS noncustodial parents required to pay, based on their states' child support guidelines, if they successfully "graduated" from the program, found a job, and had their child support orders readjusted to match their new income? For one child, parents who earn enough to put their income above the threshold that triggers a child support obligation based on the percentage of income (instead of a flat-amount minimum order) are required to pay between 4 percent and 25 percent of income, depending on the exact income level. (Some states use gross income and others use net income to determine the obligation; allowable deductions vary as well. See Appendix B.)

Some states' guidelines are structured like regressive income tax schedules so that poorer parents pay a larger proportion of their income in child support than do higher-income parents. For example, the rates in Ohio's guidelines are highest in the $700 to $800 (per month) range, which

equates to a full-time job that pays about $5 per hour and annual earnings of $8,400 to $10,800 – a below-poverty-level income for a family of three. Missouri's guidelines are also based on a regressive structure, beginning with a 24 percent rate for parents with a combined gross income of $100 to $400 per month,[15] and going down to 22 percent at $500 to $600, 21 percent at $700, and 20 at $800 to $1,000.

Minnesota and New Jersey have progressive rate structures in their child support guidelines. However, in the $700 to $800 per month gross income range, these two states and Florida require about 23 to 24 percent of income for child support, resulting in an obligation of about $175 per month for one child (if no deductions are allowed). This would reduce the income of noncustodial parents in these circumstances (assuming the custodial parents receive AFDC and have no countable income) to about $575 per month, or about $135 per week. This is still considerably more than the median state AFDC grant for an adult and two children, and is just above the poverty level for a single person.[16]

III. Implementing Enhanced Child Support Enforcement in PFS

All nine PFS pilot sites made progress in building a CSE system able to respond to the circumstances of the target group and effectively enforce noncustodial parents' child support obligations. Despite the diversity of approaches, themes and lessons emerged that provide valuable points of reference for the next stage of the PFS demonstration and perhaps for the CSE system nationwide.

A. Adjusting Obligations Downward for Unemployed Noncustodial Parents

A key enhancement to the CSE systems in the PFS pilot sites was a method to adjust noncustodial parents' child support obligations downward to reflect their unemployed status and lowered ability to pay support at the point they were referred to the program. During the pilot phase, it became the standard practice in three sites – Minnesota, Missouri, and Tennessee – to reduce the existing child support orders of noncustodial parents referred to PFS to a minimum amount. New

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[15]As described in Appendix B, some states' guidelines count the incomes of both the custodial and noncustodial parent. All of the PFS pilot phase states exempt AFDC, General Assistance, and other means-tested public assistance programs from countable income for calculating child support obligations.

[16]The median state AFDC benefit (at the maximum allowed) for a family of three in January 1992 was $372. See U.S. Congress, House Committee on Ways and Means, 1992, p. 645.

Jersey also frequently reduced child support obligations, but typically not to the very minimum allowed by the state's guidelines. In the Michigan site, as an alternative to setting minimum orders, child support obligations were temporarily suspended during PFS participation.

Alabama, Florida, and Ohio did not routinely and consistently adjust PFS enrollees' child support orders during the pilot phase, although Ohio encouraged PFS parents to petition the court to modify existing orders and suspended enforcement while they were involved in the program. Prior to PFS implementation in Massachusetts, it had been the standard practice to set child support obligations at the minimum for unemployed noncustodial parents coming before the court, as well as to suspend the orders of parents who lost their jobs after child support was established; thus, routine reductions were usually not needed.

Because changes in child support orders generate work for already overburdened IV-D agencies and courts, the procedures that some sites devised for reducing the child support obligations of parents referred to PFS were designed to minimize return trips to court (or to administrative hearings) when the parents' fast-changing circumstances changed again. For example, in Anoka County, Minnesota, noncustodial parents were required to participate in PFS as a condition of receiving a *temporary* reduction in their child support orders to $50 per month. The parents stipulated to such court orders – meaning they agreed to the conditions – and their original orders were reinstated (without further court action) if they either failed to participate or got jobs.

A similar stipulation was employed in Michigan, although the temporary change was to suspend the court-ordered support during PFS participation (effectively creating a temporary child support order of zero) if noncustodial parents satisfied program attendance requirements. Under this arrangement, the obligation to pay the original court-ordered amount of child support was reinstated without a hearing as of the date a parent either completed the program or found a job; if he failed to comply with the stipulated agreement, the original support amount was effective from the date of the agreement, and he owed back support for the period in which the order was suspended. In addition, PFS enrollees were provided with information about how to petition the court to reduce orders they felt were too high, and the site also began reviewing PFS cases in which child support orders had been set by default in the absence of income information, resulting in very high arrearages. Arrears in these cases were occasionally settled for less than the accumulated debt – effectively compensating for an initial mismatch between the noncustodial parents' ability to pay and their previous child support

orders.[17] Finally, Michigan reviewed and revised its policy for assigning responsibility to noncustodial parents for "confinement costs" (medical expenses for births) during the pilot phase to avoid these high debts.

An incentive-oriented approach to reducing child support obligations during PFS participation was also employed in the Tennessee site: The obligations of noncustodial parents referred to PFS were reduced to a minimum amount (usually $50 per month per child) by Tennessee's Juvenile Court judges. Parents could then have even these minimum amounts of child support credited as paid if they satisfactorily participated in PFS.[18]

B. Adjusting Obligations Upward

To implement a fully responsive CSE system, PFS sites also needed to adopt methods of quickly adjusting parents' support orders upward when they went to work or when they failed to fulfill their obligation to participate in the program. The temporary reduction, suspension, and crediting methods for downward adjustments in child support orders discussed above were usually chosen by PFS sites because it is often easier to reinstate a previous child support order than to review and modify a minimum order. This is especially likely to be true if the conditions for reinstatement – such as successful completion of PFS or failure to satisfactorily participate – are stipulated in advance by the noncustodial parent and a court review schedule is set up in the order enabling the court to retain jurisdiction over the case. Courts may also delegate this readjustment authority to administrative agencies based on prior agreements; in jurisdictions where this is allowed, the IV-D agency is empowered to act without going back to court, avoiding delays that can result from full dockets. (PFS sites also instituted several procedures to minimize the slowdown in child support establishment and enforcement that full court calendars can produce.)

Upward modification of child support orders for PFS enrollees was not automatic, however. The New Jersey site, which routinely reduced the child support orders of the PFS fathers to $15 to

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[17]Such mismatches were particularly likely to have occurred in the Michigan site because the formula used to set child support in these cases imputed the state's net median income ($260 per week) to the noncustodial parents, resulting in an order of $67 per week for one child ($268 per month). Not surprisingly, the Michigan site had the largest average arrearage amount of all PFS sites ($5,669), and almost 41 percent of parents referred to Michigan's PFS program had child support arrearages of $5,000 or more. (Only in the Florida site was this proportion higher – 42.8 percent.)

[18]In the early months of PFS operation, the Missouri site also forgave unpaid child support debts of noncustodial parents under certain circumstances as an incentive for noncustodial parents to participate, but this policy ran afoul of federal interpretation of a 1986 law called the Bradley Amendment prohibiting retroactive modification of child support orders, and it was dropped.

$20 per month per child, decided to put off bringing these cases back to court until a routine three-year adjustment and review was scheduled – in part, to enable the PFS fathers time to get on their feet.

C. Working Previously Unworked Cases

As discussed earlier in this chapter, many CSE agencies de-emphasize nonpaying cases in which there is no evidence that the noncustodial parent has income. Thus, in order to build a service population for PFS – which targeted this type of case – sites needed to devise new strategies for identifying and processing these cases.

1. **Enhanced CSE Staffing.** The main solution to working the difficult – usually low-priority – cases that were targeted for PFS was to hire or reassign CSE workers who would be solely dedicated to a PFS caseload. This step was taken in Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, New Jersey, Ohio, and Tennessee. Searching computerized child support databases and court dockets for noncustodial parents likely to be eligible for PFS and making sure these men got referred to the program were major tasks of most new designated PFS/CSE workers.

Adding specialized staff in the IV-D agency for PFS cases did not guarantee that previously unworked cases would receive attention, however. One reason was that the CSE workers assigned to PFS caseloads also spent a substantial proportion of their time conducting intake interviews, handling procedures to suspend or reinstate child support orders, following up on noncompliance, and getting income deduction orders (for immediate wage withholding) in place for the PFS participants who went to work. Also, in some sites, the pre-existing CSE process generated a continuous flow of PFS-eligible cases, so it was not necessary to identify old, unworked cases in order to operate the pilot phase program.

Dedicating CSE staff to PFS cases was encouraged, but not required. In the sites that chose not to assign the PFS caseload to specialized CSE staff, organizational arrangements were made to ensure that even if PFS cases were dispersed among regular CSE workers, they were not neglected. For example, in Florida, the PFS program hired a CSE administrative aide who kept track of CSE actions on PFS cases, prompted the regular CSE caseworkers when they needed to initiate enforcement steps, and performed the clerical tasks necessary to get income deduction orders to the employers of PFS participants who went to work. In Massachusetts, three CSE staff were designated liaisons to the PFS program. Thus, even though the IV-D cases of PFS enrollees were dispersed throughout the entire CSE unit of the Springfield office of the Department of Revenue, staff from the other agencies in the Massachusetts PFS consortium could identify Department of Revenue staff whose job it was to

relay policy and program information to the whole unit and to solve difficult problems. There was a liaison with similar responsibilities in Alabama.

In Montgomery County, Ohio, a CSE agency staff person was designated to act on PFS cases even though he did not carry a PFS caseload. In addition, he reviewed the CSE agency's monthly "default" list (the nonpaying or delinquent parents – the enforcement cases) to refer apparently eligible noncustodial parents to the prosecutor for a summons to a hearing and a court order to participate in PFS. He also reviewed new paternity cases and the Domestic Relations Court docket to mark potentially eligible cases for judges and referees.

2. **Demonstrating the "Smoke-Out" Potential of Previously Unworked Cases.** The Ohio PFS site provided a clear example of the potential for uncovering previously unknown employment and collecting child support when IV-D agencies work all cases and back up universal enforcement with a substantial participation requirement. Before the PFS program existed in Montgomery County, noncustodial parents who were not paying their child support (and for whom no current income information was available) would have been sent letters directing them to seek work. Once it became possible to send unemployed parents to job search and job training services offered by PFS, nonpayers whose children were receiving AFDC were routinely called into court.

As of May 1993, in the Ohio site, approximately 1,300 hearings had been scheduled for noncustodial parents who had not been paying court-ordered support, and 650 parents showed up in response to summonses. (Many of the rest would eventually show up in court after further enforcement efforts.) Of these, nearly 190 admitted previously unreported employment when confronted with the possibility of being referred to PFS, and income withholding was immediately instituted for them. This is a pure net impact of the PFS intervention. The other 460 who came to court were referred to PFS for services.

3. **Which CSE Cases Are Worked?** While several other sites, in addition to Ohio, may have begun to work *more* nonpaying child support cases during the PFS pilot phase, it was difficult to pin down the previous practices. Thus, an essential question about the pilot phase remains unanswered: Which nonpaying noncustodial parents were subject to enforcement – and what types or levels of enforcement? Only the Florida site seemed to have routinely worked no-income cases prior to PFS. CSE officials in the other sites reported no hard-and-fast rules for identifying cases to be enforced. As a result, it is extremely difficult to say precisely how PFS changed child support enforcement in the nine sites and to gauge the extent of the program's "smoke-out" effect (except in Ohio).

Part of the difficulty is the fact that many CSE administrators are reluctant to talk about any

divergence between the expectations set forth in federal regulations for case-processing and the reality of local practice. (Federal standards are described in Appendix A.) In addition, the triage of cases that characterizes IV-D operations (described earlier in this chapter) occurs at the caseworker level, when these staff select from overfilled in-boxes or computer messages the items for action that provide new, usable information and set aside the inquiries with negative responses; administrators may not see this process at close hand.

It should also be noted that "working cases" can mean as little as checking quarterly data reported by employers to the Unemployment Insurance wage-reporting system to identify nonpayers with identifiable employers, or it can mean the kind of effort made by Ohio, which tried to cast a net widely to bring in all noncustodial parents in AFDC cases who were behind on their child support.

For example, although the Michigan site periodically produced a list of potentially eligible noncustodial parents from its computerized database by selecting nonpaying cases in which there was no employer recorded, these lists were not used very often to find PFS-eligible parents because an adequate flow of referrals to the program was continually generated by the regular enforcement process. In other words, cases were being "worked" that resulted in referrals to PFS, but the universe of PFS-eligible parents was at least partially preselected by the regular enforcement process. The relationship between the PFS program in this site and regular CSE enforcement activities was relatively straightforward: When parents of AFDC children who had not been paying court-ordered child support were questioned in an enforcement hearing and found to be unemployed, they were referred to PFS. But who among all the nonpaying absent parents of AFDC children ended up in court – and thus which parents were targeted for PFS – were sensitive questions during the pilot phase because many of the African-American men referred to PFS perceived child support enforcement (and PFS by extension) to be aimed at them.[19]

The answers to questions about which noncustodial parents end up in court on child support complaints may have more to do with the police practices in most communities than with the child support system *per se*. When child support enforcement escalates to the stage of issuing a bench warrant, cooperative law enforcement agreements in many communities call for these warrants to be posted to all police officers' information systems. The result is that anyone stopped by a law enforcement official for any reason (such as a traffic offense, a broken taillight on a car, or "suspicious" behavior) might be identified, questioned, and then detained for nonpayment of child

[19]See Furstenberg, Sherwood, and Sullivan, 1992.

support when the law enforcement official checks for outstanding warrants against the person stopped. If there is a disproportionate police presence in low-income and minority neighborhoods, then child support enforcement may look selective, based on poverty versus privilege, minority versus majority status – especially when such neighborhoods have higher unemployment rates than surrounding communities and a potentially higher concentration of noncustodial parents unable to pay support.

D. Expeditious Case-Processing Procedures

Expeditious procedures were also essential to managing the PFS caseloads. Some were already in place, while others were adopted as enhancements for child support enforcement during the pilot phase. Among the most important were:

- **Consent rather than adversarial processes**. To take one example (although it was not an important source of referrals to PFS), the Michigan site conducted a paternity acknowledgment program in local hospitals.

- **"Mass" procedures for dealing with crowded court calendars**. Several PFS sites were able to get a regular block of a court schedule allocated to the child support agency specifically for PFS cases without requiring that the individual cases be docketed days or weeks in advance.

- **Court orders that cover several contingencies or scenarios**. These procedures enable courts to maintain jurisdiction in cases and/or administrative agencies to take action without having a case reheard – for example, when child support obligations are suspended under rules for reinstating them when noncustodial parents do not attend PFS activities.

- **"Portable" income deduction orders**. Such orders allow wage withholding for any job a noncustodial parent is found to hold. With these orders, CSE staff do not have to return to court to request a new order when they learn of a parent's job change. (See below for PFS examples.)

- **Court exercise of continuing jurisdiction over CSE cases in which effective service of process has been accomplished once.** These procedures usually apply to temporary or suspended child support orders and might be combined with the practice of scheduling future court hearings on PFS participants' progress at the time of a hearing to refer them to the program. The continuing jurisdiction makes it possible to notify noncustodial parents about their status and obligations in practical, time-saving ways and to act in response to parents change in circumstances or behavior.

- **Deputizing staff attorneys of the IV-D agency as prosecutors**. This enables them to negotiate complaints and settle judgments (which might follow preset guidelines) in order to avoid litigation.

The common denominator for these procedures is the courts, which are not the first or only bottleneck in IV-D case-processing, but did represent a major challenge in several sites. Both the Florida and Massachusetts sites shifted IV-D dockets to specific judges during the pilot demonstration in response to the difficulties of managing CSE caseloads. To carry out a 1993 law passed by the state legislature, Minnesota will implement an administrative (nonjudicial) process for child support and establishment in 1994, and Ohio recently added administrative procedures for paternity and support establishment to its court-based CSE system. Missouri already had an administrative CSE system when PFS began. In other sites, most notably Michigan, numerous court functions were delegated to hearing officers or administrative agency staff on the basis of agreements with the courts about precise procedures to be followed and when discretion was appropriate.

One IV-D procedure of importance in PFS was mandated by federal law but might also be considered an example of expeditious case-processing: immediate income withholding for noncustodial parents with new or modified child support orders or for nonpaying cases (see Appendix A for details). "Immediate" is a critical attribute of this procedure. Staff in several PFS sites related cases in which noncustodial parents succeeded in finding jobs but collected two or three paychecks before the CSE system was able to get income withholding orders approved by the court (if necessary) and to the parents' employers. These men had gotten accustomed to receiving their entire wages, and the shock of the child support deduction, when it finally occurred, was so great that they quit.

The simplest approach to income withholding used by the sites was the portable income deduction order. The Florida and Michigan CSE staff, for example, made it a practice to ask the court, at the time a parent's support was established, for an income deduction order that would apply to all of the parent's subsequent employers. This contrasts with the traditional approach of requesting court approval for every instance in which income was to be withheld, under rules that allowed income withholding only when an arrearage existed. Portable income deduction orders simplified the CSE task of keeping up in "real time" with noncustodial parents who change jobs frequently.[20]

E. Paternity Establishment

Although PFS is principally aimed at the segment of noncustodial parents in welfare cases who already have child support orders in place, three sites – Michigan, Missouri, and New Jersey – set out in the pilot phase to conduct "early intervention" by recruiting noncustodial parents who had not

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[20]A Minnesota state law requires employers to check with CSE agencies about all their newly hired employees to ensure that wage withholding can be instituted quickly. A similar policy has been recommendations for the IV-D program nationwide.

yet established paternity. Because the jurisdiction of the Kent County, Michigan, Friend of the Court (one of the PFS lead agencies in Michigan) is limited in paternity cases to conciliation for the purpose of establishing child support and visitation agreements (which are subject to the District Court's approval), early intervention in the Michigan PFS site occurred prior to PFS enrollment and did not account for a substantial share of the PFS cases. The model used in this county for hospital-based paternity acknowledgment did point up two interesting statistics, however: About half of the fathers in out-of-wedlock births in local hospitals were willing to acknowledge paternity by signing "legitimation affidavits," but only in about half of the paternity acknowledgment cases did the mother eventually (within about a year) receive AFDC.

New Jersey's early intervention procedures involved direct recruitment of alleged fathers by the nonprofit lead PFS agency after mothers applying for AFDC identified them (rather than limiting the program's intake process to referrals by the IV-D agency and the courts). There was no special data collection effort during the pilot phase to assess whether this approach increased paternity establishments. However, in the next phase of the demonstration, there may be an opportunity to test its effects. A key question is whether such a model makes it possible to circumvent a perennial bottleneck in the paternity establishment process: overworked AFDC eligibility workers whose principal focus is on applicants' (usually mothers') economic circumstances rather than on facilitating paternity establishment by IV-D agencies.

Missouri's early intervention activities were also focused on recruiting volunteers for PFS who had not yet established paternity but who could be attracted to the program with an offer of job training and placement assistance. Because this site also recruited volunteers among noncustodial parents with child support orders, its early intervention was not clearly distinguished from the overall program model, and no data are available on the rate at which paternity was established for those enrollees needing it.

F. A Summary of Enhancements to CSE Systems in PFS

Table 6.4 summarizes enhancements to CSE practices in the nine pilot sites and displays as well some of the pre-existing features of the sites' IV-D systems that shaped their approaches to enhanced CSE in PFS. The complexity of the activities and environments is not readily apparent in such a representation of these nine programs,[21] especially since some sites had to enhance their CSE

[21]Because the IV-D program is often county-administered, as is the legal system governing domestic relations, the PFS pilot phase actually included 11 separate CSE systems, with two counties each making up the Minnesota and Ohio sites.

TABLE 6.4

SELECTED FEATURES OF CHILD SUPPORT ENFORCEMENT IN PFS SITES:
PFS INNOVATIONS AND PRE-EXISTING PRACTICES

Site	CSE Workers Dedicated to PFS	Expedited CSE Procedures	Downward Support Adjustment During PFS	Systematically Worked No-Income Cases Before PFS	PFS Enrollment Before Paternity Establishment
Alabama	None (1 liaison)	No	No	No	No
Florida	1 case aide	Court reorganization	No	Yes	No
Massachusetts	None (3 liaisons)	Court reorganization	No	No	Yes
Michigan	2	Consent process for paternity establishment	Yes	No	No
Minnesota	2	PFS court dockets; new administrative process for CSE	Yes	No	No
Missouri	2	Administrative CSE system	Yes	No	Yes
New Jersey	1	PFS dockets	Yes	No	Yes
Ohio	2	PFS dockets	No	No	No
Tennessee	1	No	Yes	No	No

programs in order to make them work effectively for PFS parents, while others had features in place when PFS started that were well-suited to managing the cases of these parents. The box provides detailed examples of two sites' approaches to enhanced child support enforcement.

IV. Conclusions

Nationally, the CSE system is characterized by variation, the stresses of inter-agency coordination and cooperation, and pressures from the federal government to improve performance. In short, it is a system undergoing change in one general direction but by a lot of different, perhaps roundabout, routes. The pilot phase of PFS called for additional course adjustments. Specifically, PFS asked IV-D agencies in the demonstration not only to work difficult cases, but also to create a responsive CSE system for the target group that quickly adjusted their child support obligations to their ability to pay and kept track in "real time" – as opposed to the lag time of computerized record-searching – of where they were and what they were doing.

Clearly, the nine sites were able to make some adjustments, and by the fall of 1993, a number of new practices suggested that future CSE case-processing for PFS participants would be even easier. Within the constraints of the states' existing child support guidelines, the nine states were moving to align child support policies and practices in the demonstration sites with the ability-to-pay principle, and to make the existing CSE system work better for the PFS target group. While no single case-processing procedure or organizational structure seems to have guaranteed success, sites that most easily managed the implementation of new approaches for PFS and solved many of the numerous problems that arose were those that dedicated CSE staff to the effort.

A less visible, but very important, ingredient of success in implementing the enhanced CSE component was a high degree of coordination, cooperation, and joint problem-solving in each site, both *among* the various agencies involved in the IV-D system, including the courts, and *between* the IV-D and other PFS partners (such as employment and training providers). It was particularly notable when child support, employment and training, and peer support administrators were able to identify bottlenecks and barriers and devise and implement cross-agency solutions. The people working in these different agencies speak different languages, and it was often necessary for the non-CSE partners to help the CSE administrators see their existing procedures through the eyes of noncustodial parents, who were extremely critical of the CSE system. Where inter-agency communication and joint problem-solving were weak, implementation of the enhanced CSE component was difficult.

Examples of Two Approaches to Enhanced Child Support Enforcement During the PFS Pilot Phase

Minnesota's enhanced CSE component was coordinated by two CSE workers (one in each county) who were designated to work with PFS cases. These staff attended court hearings and met with noncustodial parents who were referred to PFS to complete the research forms, provide information on the program, and schedule orientation sessions. The designated workers were then responsible for handling all aspects of participants' CSE cases while they remained in PFS (and for several months afterward). This included coordinating follow-up and enforcement when parents failed to attend program activities and implementing wage withholding when parents found jobs. In addition, Anoka County developed an efficient mechanism for temporarily reducing participants' support obligations during their time in PFS: At the point of referral, the court issued an order to reduce the support obligation to $50 per month conditioned on the noncustodial parent's satisfactory participation in PFS (and the custodial parent's continued receipt of AFDC). At the same time, the court set two-month and six-month review dates. If the parent was cooperating with PFS two months later, CSE staff submitted an affidavit and the review was canceled. If he was not cooperating, the hearing was held and the original order could be reinstated. If the parent was employed at the six-month review date, his order was adjusted upward based on his current earnings. If he was still in the program, another review was scheduled.

In **Michigan**, enhanced child support enforcement was staffed by two PFS case managers who played a dual role in the program by facilitating peer support sessions as well. Employed by the Kent County Friend of the Court – the local agency responsible for child support enforcement – the case managers were assisted by two clerks. Noncustodial parents could be referred to the program by hearing officers and judges who heard child support cases, by the local agency that initiated paternity and support establishment in AFDC cases, and by regular CSE caseworkers. When a parent was referred to PFS, his child support order was temporarily suspended on the condition that he satisfactorily participate in the program. At intake interviews, the PFS caseworkers discussed with parents their rights and responsibilities, including the procedure they could use to petition the court to review and possibly modify their child support orders. PFS caseworkers scheduled newly referred parents for initial employment and training and peer support activities, and then coordinated with staff of the employment and training component to identify parents who failed to attend job search workshops; they were responsible for reinstating the child support orders of those who did not have good reasons for being absent. The PFS workers also kept track of participants who got jobs and followed up by instituting wage withholding.

CHAPTER 7

THE EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING COMPONENT

This chapter examines the employment and training services that were provided to PFS participants during the demonstration's pilot phase. The chapter begins by describing the role of this component, the challenges MDRC faced in designing guidelines for it, and the approach that was eventually adopted. The second section describes how the component was implemented in the pilot sites and examines the patterns of participation in employment and training activities. The third section describes how the component evolved during the pilot phase as the sites worked with MDRC to identify operational problems and develop strategies to strengthen the component. The fourth and final section offers some conclusions.

MDRC did not prescribe a specific employment and training service model for the PFS pilot phase. Instead, the sites were encouraged to offer a wide range of options to serve a diverse population and were required to place a special emphasis on on-the-job training (OJT), which was seen as a vehicle for providing both training and income-producing work. Overall, the pilot phase experience confirmed the feasibility of engaging noncustodial parents in employment and training activities and tracking their participation. Moreover, most of the pilot sites developed at least some strong employment and training services, and many innovative approaches were tested.

At the same time, there was considerable variation in the quality, intensity, and nature of the employment and training services participants received. A variety of institutional issues and conscious program design choices made it difficult for many sites to deliver a broad menu of employment and training options. Data on the activities of noncustodial parents who entered PFS by the end of February 1993 show that more than half of those who participated in employment and training activities received only relatively short-term job search or job-readiness services. Although more than 40 percent of the employment and training participants attended some type of education or training activity, this was mostly adult basic education classes. The pace of OJT placements was slower than expected, and relatively few participants entered classroom skills training. There was concern that this narrow mix of services was appropriate for only a subset of the PFS population.

MDRC worked closely with sites to identify the reasons for these early patterns of participation. Several kinds of technical assistance were provided, and most sites substantially changed their employment and training strategies during the pilot phase. These changes did not begin to yield

dividends until after the period covered by the data available for this report, but they should allow sites to offer a richer and more intensive mix of employment and training services in the future.

I. Defining the Employment and Training Service Approach

PFS was not designed to test a particular type of employment and training service such as a job club or a skills training course. Rather, the demonstration is examining the feasibility and, later, the impact of delivering an integrated package of employment and training and other services to a large, diverse group of noncustodial parents in the context of an enhanced CSE system. Given these broad objectives, it seems clear that no single employment and training service would be appropriate for all sites and participants.

Despite the lack of a single fixed model, it was important for MDRC to provide some guidance to sites before the project began about the overall objectives of the employment component and the types of employment and training services that seemed most likely to be effective for the PFS population. This was a difficult task, both because existing knowledge about the PFS target group was limited and because the history of employment and training programs for men has not yielded many positive results. Nevertheless, in an effort to develop guidelines for the states applying for admission to PFS, MDRC examined past research on the likely characteristics of the PFS target population, visited existing PFS-like programs that had emerged in several jurisdictions to learn more about the men served and their needs, reviewed the results of past employment programs for men, and consulted with experts on employment and training services. This section describes the results of this effort and the challenges that faced the pilot sites as they designed employment and training strategies for PFS.

A. The Role of Employment and Training in PFS

Although all four components are closely linked to the project's diverse goals, employment and training services are the core of PFS. The PFS approach is based on the hypothesis, grounded in research findings, that higher incomes among noncustodial parents are associated with greater and more regular child support payments.[1] Peer support and mediation are intended to reinforce the importance of parental responsibility and provide a forum for discussing and resolving issues related to support, and enhanced child support enforcement aims to strengthen the link between income and

[1]Although several studies have found that child support payments are associated with noncustodial parents' incomes (see, for example, Sonenstein and Calhoun, 1988), it has not been shown that a program that *increases* the income of noncustodial parents will necessarily lead to higher child support payments.

child support. But the employment component is the key to making greater support a reality for many of the parents in PFS. The baseline data described in Chapter 3 appear to confirm that many noncustodial parents lack the income to pay child support.

At the same time, PFS employment and training services must reflect the fact that the normal patterns of work and child support for the program's target population are probably both dynamic and diverse. As is the case for participants in any other employment and training program, some PFS participants would begin to work and pay child support even if the program did not exist. Others would fare quite poorly without the program. Thus, in order to make a difference, PFS must help participants find better jobs than they could obtain on their own, or to get jobs faster and/or keep them longer. If PFS succeeds in this goal, the short-term investment (of foregone earnings and support payments plus program resources[2]) will be more than repaid by the later increase in earnings and support payments. The random assignment evaluation planned for Phase II of the demonstration will assess whether this happens.

B. Promising Employment and Training Service Approaches

Ultimately, MDRC's background research yielded two broad and, to some extent, contradictory conclusions:

- An array of employment and training services – including opportunities for participants to build their skills and earning capacity – would be needed to serve a diverse group of noncustodial parents.

- Both institutional realities and the likely circumstances of noncustodial parents suggested that intense time pressure would play a major role in service delivery for this group; many noncustodial parents would want jobs and income quickly.

Each of these is discussed in more detail below.

1. The Need for Skill-Building Services. Most of the earlier programs linking child support enforcement with employment and training services (described in Chapter 1) relied on relatively short-term job search assistance activities. This emphasis was not surprising given the limited funding that was typically available for these efforts, and the fact that they emerged from a CSE system that focuses on maximizing short-term support collections. The programs were designed

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[2]Earnings are "foregone" to the extent that noncustodial parents enter skill-building activities that temporarily remove them from the labor market. Child support payments may be foregone when the CSE agency routinely reduces noncustodial parents' support orders while they participate in PFS. As described in Chapter 6, several of the PFS pilot sites took this step.

to get noncustodial parents into the workforce and paying child support as quickly as possible.

Although no systematic studies were undertaken to assess the effectiveness of these programs, MDRC concluded that a broader employment and training strategy was needed for PFS. This conclusion did not imply that job search activities were inappropriate or ineffective. On the contrary, studies have shown that programs relying primarily on job search can generate modest earnings and employment impacts, particularly for women on welfare.[3] Moreover, other research has shown that minority men – who were likely to account for a large proportion of the PFS population – often have difficulty in the labor market because they do not have access to the same kinds of informal networks that many white men use to find jobs.[4] Programs that teach participants formal job search techniques and help them identify and connect with job openings may help minority men gain access to jobs they could not otherwise find.

However, while recognizing the value of job search assistance, MDRC concluded that these activities would be sufficient only for a subset of the PFS population. Studies have shown that the jobs people obtain through programs stressing job search usually pay about the same, on average, as the jobs people obtain on their own. When these programs produce earnings impacts, they usually do so by increasing the proportion of people who work at all, or by helping people find jobs more quickly than they otherwise would. The limited available data suggested that the PFS population was likely to be diverse, including men with a variety of skill and education levels and work histories. Although many would face daunting barriers to employment, most would have had at least some work experience. Some fraction would have worked regularly in the past, but many would have exhibited patterns of unstable or sporadic employment in low-wage or "off the books" jobs. Job search assistance seemed unlikely to move many of the men in this last group into better, more stable jobs that could help them break the cycle of intermittent employment and earn enough to both support themselves and meet their child support obligations. This suggested that PFS should include, in addition to job search assistance, opportunities for participants to enter skill-building education and training activities that might lead to better jobs.

Two recent studies have shown that broad-coverage, mandatory programs using this kind of mixed approach have produced some positive results for disadvantaged men. The first was an evaluation of the Saturation Work Initiative Model (SWIM), operated in San Diego County from 1985

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[3]See, for example, Gueron and Pauly, 1991.
[4]See, for example, Sullivan, 1989.

to 1987. Serving both male and female AFDC recipients, SWIM placed participants in a fixed sequence of activities beginning with a two-week job search workshop. Those who failed to find employment during this period were usually placed in a three-month unpaid work experience position. Those who were still unemployed after completing work experience could be referred to education and training programs in the community. As might be expected given the sequence of activities, SWIM participants were more likely to receive job search services than education and training. Nevertheless, the program's emphasis on skill-building activities was much stronger than in most previous welfare-to-work programs. SWIM produced statistically significant increases in the employment rates of (mostly male) recipients of AFDC-U during a five-year follow-up period.[5] The program also increased the earnings of AFDC-U clients during the first two years of follow-up, although these impacts dropped sharply beginning in the third year.[6]

More recently, California's statewide Greater Avenues for Independence (GAIN) welfare-to-work program has tested a model relying even more heavily on education and training. Under GAIN rules, individuals who do not have a high school diploma or who fail a basic skills test are *required* to enroll in education activities unless they opt to try job search first. In six counties participating in MDRC's evaluation of GAIN, from 49 to 91 percent of AFDC-U clients who started any GAIN activity participated in education or training during the first 11 months after attending a program orientation.[7] During the first two years of follow-up, GAIN produced statistically significant impacts on the employment rates of AFDC-U clients in four of the six study counties and impacts on earnings in three counties.[8]

Although these results are encouraging, it is important to note that the SWIM and GAIN target populations differed from the PFS population in several respects. First, AFDC-U clients are by definition public assistance recipients, and generally live with their families.[9] Second, individuals usually must have a recent connection to the labor force in order to be eligible for AFDC-U.[10]

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[5]The AFDC-Unemployed Parent (AFDC-U) program provides assistance to two-parent families in which one parent is unemployed or incapacitated.

[6]Friedlander and Hamilton, 1993.

[7]Most of these individuals attended adult basic education, GED preparation, or English as a Second Language classes rather than skills training programs.

[8]Friedlander, Riccio, and Freedman, 1993.

[9]In this respect, the SWIM and GAIN populations probably overlap with the PFS population: Some PFS participants lived with at least some of their children and may have received AFDC-U, and some of the SWIM and GAIN participants may have been the custodial parent of one or more of their children and the noncustodial parent of others.

[10]In the GAIN research counties that served the full population of AFDC-U clients, from 72 to 80 percent of these recipients reported having been employed within the prior two years.

Third, California's AFDC-U caseload includes many Asian immigrants who are not present in large numbers in other areas of the country.

2. **The Need for Immediate Income.** It was assumed that most of the noncustodial parents in PFS, unlike the GAIN and SWIM participants, would not be public assistance recipients and, therefore, would need immediate income.[11] Long classroom training or education programs, although possibly useful in building some participants' earning power, would delay their ability to earn money in the short term. Thus, participants might not be willing to make the initial investment required to achieve longer-term impacts, or would need a way to combine training and work to cover their living expenses. (Neither JOBS nor JTPA could provide income support for these parents while they participated in program services.) In addition, it was assumed that many of the participants would have had negative school experiences and would resist making a long-term commitment to classroom-based skills training or basic education programs.

The institutional imperative of the CSE system reinforced the need to get participants into income-generating activities quickly. Although CSE agencies participating in the demonstration explicitly agreed to make some short-term investment in services and foregone support payments in hopes of longer-term payoffs, many had not agreed to an approach that could delay support payments for long periods.

C. Reconciling Competing Priorities

MDRC sought to balance these two objectives – a focus on skill-building activities and participants' need for immediate income – in developing specific guidelines for the states applying for admission to PFS. The resulting guidelines for the employment and training component emphasized two main points:

- **The need for a menu of service options.** It was assumed that, without countervailing pressure, most PFS sites would emphasize short-term job search activities (for the reasons cited above). Thus, states applying for admission to the demonstration were strongly encouraged to develop a range of employment and training options for PFS participants including both job search assistance and education and training opportunities. The guidelines urged program planners to think about service strategies for three broad groups of participants: (1) those

[11]Some PFS participants may have been recipients of General Assistance or AFDC-U, and others may have been supported, in part, by an AFDC grant received by a relative or partner. (General Assistance is a state- or locally funded public assistance program available in some states for individuals who do not qualify for other cash aid.)

with histories of steady work, (2) those with histories of unstable employment in low-wage positions, and (3) those with little or no work history.

- **A special focus on on-the-job training (OJT).** As part of the effort to ensure that skill-building activities would be available, MDRC required each site to commit to provide at least 100 OJT slots for PFS participants. OJT was seen as an ideal way to wed the need for training with the myriad pressures for immediate income (and child support payments). Under OJT arrangements, individuals are placed in jobs, and public funds are used to provide their employers with a temporary (usually three- to six-month) wage subsidy for agreeing to hire and train a disadvantaged employee. A recent national evaluation of JTPA found positive impacts during a 30-month follow-up period for men who volunteered for the program and were deemed appropriate for OJT.[12]

Apart from having to follow these general guidelines, states were free to design the employment component to reflect their own objectives and views of the target population. For example, while MDRC stressed the importance of having clearly defined criteria for matching participants with specific types of services, sites were not required to adopt a particular approach to this vital task. Thus, the pilot phase presented an opportunity for sites to experiment with a range of employment and training strategies.

D. The Implementation Challenge

Developing the kind of employment and training component envisioned by MDRC presented sites with a set of difficult operational choices and institutional challenges. Three examples follow.

1. Matching Participants with Services. With a diverse target population and a broad menu of employment and training service options, strategies for matching participants with appropriate services assume great importance. Previous research (focusing mainly on welfare-to-work programs) has highlighted the difficulty of this task.[13]

Employment and training programs use a variety of methods to match participants with services. These include:

- **Up-front assessment.** Some programs begin with a formal assessment of the participants' skills, education, work history, interests, and barriers to employment. This process, which may involve a lengthy series of tests and interviews, results in an individualized service plan for each participant. This approach is typically used in the JTPA system.

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[12]Bloom et al., 1994.

[13]Auspos and Sherwood, 1992.

- **Initial appraisal.** A few large-scale, mandatory welfare-to-work initiatives make initial activity assignments on the basis of a few easily measured factors, such as educational attainment or recent work history. Information on these factors can be obtained during a relatively brief interview, sometimes called an appraisal.[14]

- **Fixed sequence for all participants.** Some other mandatory programs assign all participants to a fixed sequence of services, typically beginning with job search. This identifies participants who can find jobs on their own, and helps the others clarify their interests and goals. Those who fail to find employment within a few weeks may be assigned to education or training activities, often after a formal assessment. This was essentially the model used in the SWIM program.

Each of these methods has advantages and disadvantages, and each reflects the overall goals and philosophy of the program in which it is used. For example, up-front assessment, which is typically used in programs stressing education and training, may provide a wealth of information about participants. However, assessments tend to be expensive, and research suggests that assessors' ability to accurately predict which participants will prosper in particular services is limited. On the other hand, an up-front job search strategy, which may reflect a program goal of helping many participants enter the labor market quickly, is a relatively simple and inexpensive way to "sort" large numbers of participants. However, critics note that it is difficult in practice to strike a balance between promoting immediate employment and identifying participants with training needs. Thus, they suggest that these programs often encourage people to accept low-wage jobs that are unlikely to last. The pilot sites needed to consider these issues in designing a service assignment strategy for PFS.

2. **Institutional Barriers.** Before PFS began, no existing employment and training service system saw poor, noncustodial parents as a priority target group or had fashioned a package of services designed to meet their needs. Thus, PFS was almost certain to require new patterns of organizational cooperation. Moreover, the focus on skill-building activities sought by MDRC was not necessarily consistent with "business as usual" in the relevant sectors of the employment and training system.

It was clear from the outset that both the JOBS and JTPA systems would be important partners in the PFS employment component. The statutory roots of the demonstration assured that JOBS

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[14]For example, in Florida's Project Independence (the state's JOBS program), individuals who have completed at least the 12th grade or who have worked in at least 12 of the previous 24 months are determined to be "job-ready" and are assigned to a sequence of job search activities. Clients who are determined not to be job-ready (and job-ready individuals who fail to find employment in job search activities) are referred to a more complete assessment, which may result in a referral to education or training. See Kemple and Haimson, 1994.

funding would support PFS employment and training activities. JTPA agencies, which often play a role in local JOBS programs, are experienced providers of education and training (including OJT) for the disadvantaged. However, as discussed in Chapter 1, PFS asked both of these systems to make important changes in their standard operating procedures.

Most local JOBS programs have had limited experience serving men; AFDC-U recipients usually account for a small fraction of the AFDC caseload. Moreover, OJT, designed to be a core PFS employment and training service, is rarely used in JOBS programs.[15] Thus, PFS presented these agencies with both an unfamiliar target group and a new service approach. Nevertheless, change was feasible because, as described in Chapter 2, JOBS is in fact as much a funding mechanism as a service organization. In many jurisdictions, JOBS agencies contract for key services, especially those involving more intensive education and training. The challenge was to encourage JOBS agencies to rethink their institutional strategies to ensure the involvement of the organizations best suited to meeting the needs of mostly male noncustodial parents.

Local JTPA agencies were natural partners in the service effort, especially given the PFS focus on skill-building activities and OJT.[16] However, the JTPA system has been drawn in conflicting directions in recent years. On the one hand, JTPA is the nation's major training program for the economically disadvantaged and, as such, claims to provide individualized, client-driven services that are more intensive than those typically offered in JOBS or other programs in which participation is mandatory. On the other hand, the JTPA system has been criticized – at least until recently – for emphasizing low-cost, short-term services to relatively job-ready clients. This criticism arose because, in its initial years, JTPA had in place performance standards for local agencies that rewarded high job placement rates, high placement wages, and low costs per "success story." Critics alleged that these standards discouraged many local JTPA programs from serving clients who were less likely to be placed in good jobs or from providing relatively intensive, skill-building services.[17]

As PFS was being developed, the JTPA system was under increasing pressure to target its services on those with greater barriers to employment and to provide more long-term services. Thus, the demonstration emerged at a time when the JTPA system, at least in theory, was seeking new ways to reach out to harder-to-serve clients. Moreover, as is the case for the JOBS program, local JTPA

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[15]Lurie and Hagen, 1993.

[16]The role of JTPA in the PFS employment and training component was not specified in the application guidelines, although sites were encouraged to work closely with local JTPA agencies.

[17]U.S. General Accounting Office, 1989, 1990.

programs contract with an array of local service providers, so the system has the potential to be quite flexible in responding to previously unmet needs. On the other hand, unlike JOBS, JTPA has a long history of outcome-driven performance standards that discourage risk.[18]

3. **Decreased Use of OJT.** Despite the positive evaluation results described earlier, there were two serious obstacles to the heavy focus on OJT in PFS. First, while most JTPA Service Delivery Areas (SDAs) have extensive experience with OJT, this service is often perceived to be appropriate for participants who are judged to be "job-ready" overall, but to lack a specific occupational skill. JTPA staff contend that employers are rarely willing to take risks on participants facing more formidable barriers. It was not clear what proportion of the PFS population would be appropriate for OJT placement, but the application guidelines implicitly recognized that many would not: Sites were required to develop 100 OJT slots and to serve 300 participants.

A second, more serious problem concerned recent developments within the JTPA system that had pushed many SDAs to de-emphasize or even eliminate OJT as a service option. Investigations by the U.S. Department of Labor's Inspector General in the 1980s had revealed that OJT was often used to subsidize employers in situations where little documented training occurred. Thus, tighter performance audits and new federal regulations required JTPA agencies to carefully document the training that would be provided during the subsidy period, and to ensure that the length of the subsidized training reflected the characteristics of the job for which the employee was being trained. Although these regulations were intended to prevent abuse rather than to reduce the number of OJT contracts written, many local JTPA agencies claimed that the new, tighter rules made the OJT "package" more difficult to sell to employers by potentially increasing the paperwork burden and decreasing the size of the subsidies the agencies were able to pay employers.

In order to help sites develop and implement the employment component, make vital choices, and cope with obstacles such as those described above, MDRC provided two technical assistance manuals during the planning period that preceded the pilot phase. The first was a general guide discussing alternative strategies for determining what types of employment services are appropriate for particular participants. The second described a "high support" version of OJT designed for participants who were somewhat more disadvantaged than the typical OJT candidate. During a kick-

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[18]The current JOBS performance standards focus more on process than on outcomes: States are required to engage specific percentages of their AFDC caseloads in JOBS services. PFS usually accounted for a small proportion of the total JOBS caseload in a jurisdiction and thus did not seriously affect the participation rate calculations.

off conference for representatives of all pilot sites, two sessions were devoted to OJT design and marketing strategies. Additional technical assistance was provided during the course of the pilot phase, as discussed below.

II. Employment and Training in the Pilot Sites

As might have been expected, the sites responded to MDRC's general guidelines with a variety of employment and training strategies. This section describes the nature of the employment and training services offered by sites, the staffing and structure of the component, and the patterns of participation in these activities, focusing mostly on the early part of the pilot phase. The next section discusses how the component evolved and changed during the pilot.

A. Services, Staffing, and Organizational Approaches

As described in previous chapters, each of the pilot sites started with different institutional resources and linkages and a distinct vision of PFS, and each developed its own version of the program. This variation was perhaps most evident in the employment component.

1. Service Options. Working within the application guidelines, each of the PFS sites developed a range of employment and training options for participants. Although the content and schedules of these activities varied widely across sites, the overall "menu" typically included the following general categories of services:

- **Group or individual job search.** While varying considerably from site to site, these activities generally followed one of two patterns: (1) group job clubs that began with one to two weeks of classroom instruction in job-seeking and job-holding skills followed by several weeks of structured job search, often with the use of a phone bank, or (2) supervised individual job search in which participants worked with a staff person to seek employment.[19] Most sites employed job developers who were responsible for identifying job openings for PFS participants.

- **Job-readiness or pre-employment training.**[20] This typically involved two to four weeks of classroom instruction in "world of work" skills, self-esteem

[19]These individualized efforts may be underreported in MDRC's participation data system.

[20]In practice, the distinction between the first two categories of activities became blurred in many of the pilot sites. For example, in reporting on participants' attendance in program activities, some sites used the term "job club" to refer to an activity that closely resembled job-readiness training in other sites. In other cases, both job-readiness and job search activities were provided through the same agency during a single two- to four-week session, and it was not possible to separate them. Thus, these two categories of activities are combined in most of the tables and figures that follow.

building, and motivational activities, but did not usually include job-seeking skills or active job search.

- **Classroom remedial education.** Also called adult basic education (ABE), this usually comprised basic reading and math instruction, often including preparation for the General Educational Development (GED) test. Some programs offered individualized, computer-based instruction, while others operated more like traditional high school classes. Post-secondary education, though not heavily used in PFS, is also included in this category.

- **Classroom skills training.** This included training courses in specific occupational areas, such as truck-driving, office skills, or electronics.

- **On-the-job training (OJT).** As noted earlier, each site committed itself to develop at least 100 OJT slots for PFS participants.

Although almost all of the sites developed the capacity to deliver each of these types of services to at least some participants, a variety of factors led each site to emphasize only one or two of them in practice. Thus, as will be discussed below, the menu of services actually available to most PFS participants was more limited than the one described above.

2. **Organizational Structure.** Although most of the PFS lead agencies were employment and training providers, each site needed to assemble a diverse network of agencies to provide the set of services described above. As illustrated in Table 7.1, these included JOBS and JTPA agencies, a variety of nonprofit organizations, school districts, vocational schools, and community colleges.[21] The organizational and financial linkages connecting these providers with the PFS lead agency were typically complex and varied widely from site to site.

In several sites, these networks grew directly from earlier linkages forged in the JOBS program or some other employment and training initiative. For example, in structuring PFS, Ohio relied primarily on providers that were already contracted to serve JOBS participants. Similarly, the key employment and training agencies in Michigan had previously provided services for both the JOBS program and an earlier initiative for noncustodial parents. In other sites, such as New Jersey, the

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[21]This discussion and Table 7.1 focus on the agencies providing services, rather than their funding sources. Most PFS services were supported to some extent with either JOBS or JTPA funds. Thus, in a sense, the organizations whose staff provided these activities can be referred to as JOBS or JTPA-funded agencies (especially since some of them obtained funding almost exclusively through one of these sources). However, this section distinguishes between situations where public agencies that administer the JOBS and JTPA programs in a jurisdiction provided services directly, using their own staff, and those where JOBS or JTPA funds were used to pay for services provided by private nonprofit organizations, school districts, colleges, and so forth.

TABLE 7.1

KEY PROVIDERS OF EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING SERVICES IN THE PARENTS' FAIR SHARE PILOT SITES

Site	Name of Provider	Type of Agency	Services Provided
Alabama	Mobile County Department of Human Resources/JOBS program (L)	County human services agency	Job-readiness; job search; OJT and job development
	Mobile public schools	School district	Adult basic education
	Mobile Consortium/Job Training Partnership	JTPA agency	OJT funding
Florida	Florida Department of Labor and Employment Security/Project Independence (JOBS) program (L)	State labor department	Job search; job development
	Florida Community College at Jacksonville	Community college	Adult basic education; skills training
Massachusetts	Springfield Employment Resource Center (L)	Nonprofit agency	Job-readiness; job search; OJT and job development
	Corporation for Public Management	Nonprofit agency	OJT development
	Hampden County Employment and Training Consortium	JTPA agency	OJT development
	Massachusetts Career Development Institute	Nonprofit agency	Adult basic education; skills training
Michigan	Wyoming public schools	School district	Job club
	Grand Rapids Area Employment and Training Council	JTPA agency	OJT development; skills training
Minnesota (Anoka County)	Anoka County Job Training Center (L)	JTPA agency (a)	Job search; basic education; OJT and job development
Minnesota (Dakota County)	Dakota County Department of Employment and Economic Assistance (L)	County human services agency	Job search; OJT and job development

(continued)

TABLE 7.1 (continued)

Site	Name of Provider	Type of Agency	Services Provided
Missouri	Full Employment Council	JTPA agency	Job-readiness; OJT and job development; skills training
	Department of Employment Security	State labor department	Job development
	Kansas City public schools	School district	Adult basic education
New Jersey	Union Industrial Home for Children (L)	Nonprofit agency	Job-readiness; job search
	New Jersey Department of Labor	State labor department	OJT development
Ohio (Montgomery County)	Greater Dayton Job Training Program	JTPA agency	Job search; OJT development; skills training
	Goodwill Industries of Dayton	Nonprofit agency	Job search
Ohio (Butler County)	D. Russell Lee Career Center	Vocational school	Job search
Tennessee	Youth Service, USA, Inc. (L)	Nonprofit agency	Job-readiness; job search; OJT and job development
	ITT Employment and Training Systems	For-profit company	OJT development
	Shelby State College	Community college	Adult basic education; post-secondary education
	State Technical Institute at Memphis	Community college	Adult basic education; skills training; post-secondary education

NOTE: "L" indicates lead agency.
(a) The Anoka County Job Training Center operates the county's JOBS program.

JOBS program served primarily as a funding conduit; the key PFS service providers had little or no previous association with the program, although they did have experience relevant to PFS (for example, they had served male populations).

In most sites, two or three different agencies, including the lead agency, played major roles in providing employment and training services during the early months of the pilot phase. The complexity of the provider network and the identity of its key members reflected each site's overall program emphasis. In sites such as Tennessee, which stressed a wide range of services including skill-building activities, a variety of different agencies tended to play key roles. Other sites – such as Minnesota, New Jersey, and Butler County, Ohio – involved fewer providers. (See box.) As will be discussed below, the shape of the provider networks sometimes changed during the pilot as the overall nature of the employment and training component evolved.

Under the most common organizational model, the PFS lead agency directly operated the employment activity that most participants attended first – usually a job-search or job-readiness workshop – and relied on outside providers for most education and training activities. School districts or community colleges were typically responsible for basic education services; often, JTPA agencies were initially slated to provide classroom and on-the-job training, although, as described below, several sites altered this arrangement during the pilot phase.[22]

Several sites developed innovative organizational approaches to integrate employment and training services provided by multiple agencies. For example, in New Jersey, the State Department of Labor outstationed a staff person in the PFS office to develop OJT positions for program participants. To the participants, this staff person was simply one member of the PFS team; her agency affiliation was probably not apparent. As noted in Chapter 2, several sites stationed staff from a number of different employment and training providers in a central PFS program office.

3. **Staffing.** The staffing of the employment and training component depended largely on the structure of the service network and the funding arrangements that linked the key providers. In most sites, case managers employed by the lead agency were responsible for assigning participants to specific employment and training activities, monitoring their participation, arranging support services, and performing other related functions.

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[22]In some cases, outside providers were under contract and received PFS funds to serve a specified number of individuals. In other situations, outside agencies agreed to serve PFS participants using a separate funding stream such as JTPA or state education funding. Expenditures for these services were part of the cost of PFS, although they may not have been charged to the formal project budget.

Employment and Training Provider Networks

Tennessee's employment and training component involved an unusually broad and diverse set of partner agencies and a rich set of service options. The component revolved around the lead agency, Youth Service USA, Inc., a long-established nonprofit organization with experience serving youth involved in the criminal justice system. Youth Service employed the PFS case managers and a job developer.

Participants began with an intensive five-week activity that included both peer support and another curriculum called *Survival Skills for Men*, which stresses life skills and job-readiness training. This activity was led by facilitators associated with Shelby State Community College. While waiting for a new cycle to begin, participants often began a computer-assisted basic skills program in a special education center (at the college) established for PFS.

After completing the initial component, participants met with their case manager to plan an appropriate service strategy. Depending on the outcome of the meeting, participants could be referred to State Technical Institute or Shelby State for further remedial education, post-secondary education, or vocational skills training. Those referred to State Tech usually began with a one-week seminar stressing self-esteem and goal-setting. Other participants were referred to ITT Employment and Training Systems, a private for-profit company contracted to develop OJT slots (Youth Service later assumed this responsibility), or to the Youth Service job developer for direct placement assistance. Participants seeking an OJT or unsubsidized employment also participated in an ongoing job-readiness workshop run by Youth Service. Special, intensive job-seeking groups were also established for participants who lost jobs or failed to participate actively in their initial job search activity.

The employment component in **Butler County, Ohio**, a relatively small, mixed urban-rural area, was tightly consolidated. The lead agency, the county human services department's JOBS program, employed a PFS case manager but provided no employment and training services directly. Rather, PFS participants were referred to a job club operated under contract by a local vocational school, the D. Russell Lee Career Center. D. Russell Lee, the key service provider in the county's JOBS program, also offers a variety of education and training options (although few PFS participants took part in them). A small number of PFS participants were referred to the local JTPA agency, Butler County PIC/ETA, for skills training or OJT placement.

As noted earlier, job search and job-readiness activities were often led by case managers or other lead agency staff. In contrast, basic education and classroom training, typically provided by outside agencies, were almost always led by teachers associated with the school or agency that provided these services.

In most sites, at least one staff person was assigned to develop job openings for PFS participants. In some sites, this individual developed both unsubsidized jobs (including, in some cases, part-time positions for participants who were in training or education) and OJT positions; in other sites, different staff were responsible for each type of placement. Once again, job and OJT developers were associated with either the lead agency (case managers sometimes played this role) or a contracted provider (typically a JTPA agency). As described in the box, Massachusetts developed an unusual approach that split responsibility for OJT placement among three agencies (including the lead agency).

B. Early Participation Patterns

As noted in Chapter 4, about half of the noncustodial parents who were referred to PFS participated in an employment and training activity within four months of referral. This discussion examines the patterns of participation among those noncustodial parents who attended at least one session of a PFS employment and training activity. This analysis, like the analysis in Chapter 3, uses program participation data reported for all noncustodial parents who were referred to PFS through February 1993, and covers the first four months after the referral for each noncustodial parent. Thus, these data primarily refer to the early part of the pilot phase.

1. Types of Services. Table 7.2 examines the rates of participation in the four major categories of employment and training activities: job search/job-readiness activities, basic education, classroom skills training, and OJT. These data show that it was difficult for most of the sites to deliver the broad menu of employment and training activities described in the application guidelines. Overall, about three-fourths of PFS employment and training participants attended only one kind of employment and training activity during the four months following the referral. Job search/job-readiness activities were used most frequently; more than 80 percent of employment and training participants attended these activities, and more than half attended only these activities. The next most common activity was basic education; almost one-third of the participants attended these classes. About one in six participants received classroom or on-the-job training. Overall, just over 40 percent of participants attended some type of education or training activity.

These combined figures mask considerable variation across sites. The vast majority of

Innovative OJT Strategies

In **Massachusetts**, responsibility for developing OJT slots was divided among three agencies: the Springfield Employment Resource Center (SERC), which was the lead agency; the local JTPA Service Delivery Area (SDA), and the Corporation for Public Management (CPM). All three agencies were committed to placing specific numbers of PFS participants into OJT positions.

PFS case managers determined which participants were potential OJT candidates based largely on the energy and commitment they displayed during an initial two- to four-week job-readiness workshop. Most participants who attended the workshop regularly and had no severe barriers to employment were placed on the OJT list. Each week, staff from the three OJT development agencies met to review the new candidates and report on previous placements. New OJT candidates were assigned to the agencies on a rotating basis to ensure that each received participants with comparable qualifications.

This team approach maximized the reach of the PFS OJT component because each contractor had its own expertise, networks, and experience. Through October 1993, a total of 66 PFS participants had been placed in OJT positions. The contractors used a number of innovative strategies to generate placements and developed a strong cooperative relationship. In some cases, they "swapped" participants when they saw that another agency was likely to have more success. In one case, CPM paid a participant's full salary for one week, with no strings attached, to persuade a reluctant employer to give him a chance. The trial period went well, and the employer hired the participant into an OJT position. SERC developed a four- to six-week pre-OJT vocational exploration program for participants who were not ready for an OJT. Participants received a stipend of $50 a week while in this program.

The **Montgomery County, Ohio**, site experimented with an unusual group OJT placement strategy that began when the Executive Director of the Dayton Metropolitan Housing Authority (DMHA) read a story about Parents' Fair Share in the local newspaper and decided he wanted to help. After negotiations with PFS staff, DMHA agreed to hire six PFS participants into long-term OJT positions. The PFS program paid half of the trainees' salaries during the training period, and also subsidized the salary of the supervisor DMHA assigned to work with them.

The six participants, who knew one another through the peer support program, learned a wide variety of housing rehabilitation skills while working on DMHA buildings over a nine-month period. The trainees formed close bonds, car-pooling and helping one another deal with the difficult transition to work. They remained active in peer support in the evenings. Eventually, two of the trainees were hired onto DMHA's permanent payroll. The others used their work experience to find skilled positions with other employers.

TABLE 7.2

PARTICIPATION RATES IN SELECTED EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING ACTIVITIES WITHIN FOUR MONTHS OF REFERRAL TO PARENTS' FAIR SHARE AMONG NONCUSTODIAL PARENTS WHO PARTICIPATED IN EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING ACTIVITIES

Measure	Alabama	Florida	Massa-chusetts	Michigan	Minnesota		Missouri	New Jersey	Ohio		Tennessee	All Sites
					Anoka	Dakota			Butler	Mont.		
Ever participated in job search/job-readiness (%)	90.3	86.3	97.0	91.5	73.8	75.0	57.5	90.4	100.0	87.4	54.3	81.7
Ever participated in basic education (%)	21.2	39.7	2.2	9.1	28.8	7.5	98.2	3.5	4.1	7.6	86.4	30.4
Ever participated in skills training (%)	3.5	9.6	3.7	10.2	23.8	25.0	2.7	7.0	1.4	4.2	14.8	8.7
Ever participated in OJT (%)	11.5	1.4	11.2	4.6	6.3	10.0	10.6	16.5	0.0	7.6	8.0	8.3
Participated in 1 employment/ training activity (%)	**75.2**	**68.5**	**86.8**	**84.7**	**72.5**	**85.0**	**43.4**	**83.5**	**94.6**	**93.3**	**48.8**	**74.8**
Job search/job-readiness only	65.5	56.2	83.6	76.7	46.3	62.5	1.8	73.9	94.6	80.7	10.5	57.9
Basic education only	8.0	11.0	1.5	4.0	11.3	5.0	41.6	1.7	0.0	7.6	37.0	12.9
Skills training only	0.9	1.4	0.0	3.4	10.0	15.0	0.0	5.2	0.0	3.4	0.6	2.8
OJT only	0.9	0.0	1.5	0.6	5.0	2.5	0.0	2.6	0.0	1.7	0.6	1.3
Participated in 2 employment/ training activities (%)	**23.0**	**26.0**	**12.7**	**15.3**	**22.5**	**12.5**	**44.3**	**15.7**	**5.4**	**6.7**	**41.4**	**21.6**
Job search/job-readiness, basic education	11.5	21.9	0.8	4.6	13.8	0.0	43.4	0.9	4.1	0.0	32.7	12.9
Job search/job-readiness, skills training	1.8	2.7	3.0	6.3	8.8	7.5	0.0	0.9	1.4	0.8	0.0	2.7
Job search/job-readiness, OJT	9.7	0.0	9.0	4.0	0.0	2.5	0.0	13.9	0.0	5.9	1.9	4.8
Other combinations	0.0	1.4	0.0	0.6	0.0	2.5	0.9	0.0	0.0	0.0	6.8	1.2
Participated in 3 employment/ training activities (%)	**1.8**	**5.5**	**0.8**	**0.0**	**5.0**	**2.5**	**12.4**	**0.9**	**0.0**	**0.0**	**7.4**	**3.3**
Job search/job-readiness, basic education, skills training	0.9	4.1	0.0	0.0	3.8	0.0	1.8	0.9	0.0	0.0	4.9	1.5
Job search/job-readiness, basic education, OJT	0.9	1.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.5	10.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.9	1.5
Other combinations	0.0	0.0	0.8	0.0	1.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.6	0.3
Participated in 4 employment/ training activities (%)	**0.0**	**0.0**	**0.0**	**0.0**	**0.0**	**0.0**	**0.0**	**0.0**	**0.0**	**0.0**	**2.5**	**0.3**
Sample size	113	73	134	176	80	40	113	115	74	119	162	1,199

SOURCE: MDRC calculations from PFS Management Information System data.

NOTES: Includes noncustodial parents referred to Parents' Fair Share through February 28, 1993, who participated in an employment and training activity within four months of referral.

Employment and training activities include basic education, job search/job-readiness, skills training, and on-the-job training (OJT).

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participants in both Missouri and Tennessee attended basic education classes; relatively few participants in these sites attended only job search/job-readiness activities. Alabama, Florida, and Anoka County, Minnesota, also had relatively high rates of basic education participation. In the remaining sites, from 74 to 95 percent of participants attended only job search/job-readiness activities. The proportion of participants who were placed in OJT positions ranged from 0 in Butler County, Ohio, to 17 percent in New Jersey, and the proportion attending skills training varied from a low of 1.4 percent in Butler County to a high of 25 percent in Dakota County, Minnesota.

2. **Intensity of Participation.** Table 7.3 shows the total number of employment and training sessions attended per employment and training participant within four months of referral. As noted earlier, the definition of a "session" varies, from a full day of work in an OJT position to a few hours in a job club meeting. Larger numbers of sessions do not necessarily signal a stronger program because many of the participants who attended fewer sessions left PFS to take jobs. Nevertheless, this is a useful measure of the intensity of the employment and training experience.

The overall average number of sessions attended per participant was about 21.[23] Nearly 60 percent of employment and training participants attended at least 10 activity sessions; more than 25 percent attended 30 or more sessions. Once again, however, there was considerable variation across sites. The average number of sessions attended varied from more than 33 in Tennessee (where more than half of all participants attended 30 or more sessions) to about 8 in Florida (where nearly three-fourths of participants attended fewer than 7 sessions). The bottom row of the table suggests that the averages in sites such as Massachusetts, Minnesota, Missouri, and Tennessee – and, consequently, the overall average – would have been considerably higher if more months of follow-up data were available, because a substantial fraction of participants in these sites were still attending employment and training activities in the final month of follow-up.[24]

These site-level session attendance figures are clearly tied to the activity-specific participation rates shown in Table 7.2. In general, basic education, skills training, and OJT all involved substantially longer periods of participation than did job search/job-readiness activities. This is illustrated in Table 7.4, which shows the average number of sessions attended among noncustodial

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[23]The average number of hours per session across all activity types was probably between 3 and 5; this translates into a total of 72 to 120 hours of participation in employment and training activities over the first four months.

[24]As noted earlier, the figures for sessions attended did not necessarily capture all employment-related activities. For example, in some sites, case managers met with participants individually for counseling sessions that often included job search help. These meetings may not have been reported as formal activities.

TABLE 7.3

PARTICIPATION LEVELS IN EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING ACTIVITIES WITHIN FOUR MONTHS OF REFERRAL TO PARENTS' FAIR SHARE AMONG NONCUSTODIAL PARENTS WHO PARTICIPATED IN EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING ACTIVITIES

Measure	Alabama	Florida	Massa-chusetts	Michigan	Minnesota		Missouri	New Jersey	Ohio		Tennessee	All Sites
					Anoka	Dakota			Butler	Mont.		
Total number of sessions attended (%)												
1-3	23.0	13.7	9.0	11.9	41.3	12.5	24.8	15.7	14.9	16.0	3.1	15.7
4-6	19.5	58.9	3.0	11.4	11.3	17.5	12.4	14.8	13.5	23.5	6.8	15.4
7-9	15.9	5.5	9.0	7.4	7.5	2.5	6.2	10.4	10.8	21.9	1.9	9.2
10-19	20.4	11.0	26.9	26.7	20.0	20.0	18.6	21.7	43.2	19.3	19.8	22.6
20-29	8.9	5.5	11.2	19.3	6.3	12.5	12.4	12.2	12.2	4.2	14.2	11.5
30-39	0.9	4.1	11.2	10.2	2.5	17.5	4.4	10.4	1.4	5.0	17.3	8.2
40 or more	11.5	1.4	29.9	13.1	11.3	17.5	21.2	14.8	4.1	10.1	37.0	17.4
Average number of sessions attended	14.9	8.4	30.3	21.5	14.5	22.6	20.1	20.9	13.0	13.6	33.3	20.7
Still active in employment/ training in last month of follow-up (%)	31.0	32.9	50.8	16.5	53.8	65.0	53.1	39.1	5.4	35.3	71.6	41.0
Sample size	113	73	134	176	80	40	113	115	74	119	162	1,199

SOURCE: MDRC calculations from PFS Management Information System data.

NOTES: Includes noncustodial parents referred to Parents' Fair Share through February 28, 1993, who participated in an employment and training activity within four months of referral.

Employment and training activities include basic education, job search/job-readiness, skills training, and on-the-job training (OJT).

TABLE 7.4

PARTICIPATION LEVELS IN SELECTED EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING ACTIVITIES WITHIN FOUR MONTHS OF REFERRAL TO PARENTS' FAIR SHARE AMONG NONCUSTODIAL PARENTS WHO PARTICIPATED IN EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING ACTIVITIES

Measure	Alabama	Florida	Massa-chusetts	Michigan	Minnesota Anoka	Minnesota Dakota	Missouri	New Jersey	Ohio Butler	Ohio Mont.	Tennessee	All Sites
Ever participated in job search/ job-readiness (%)	**90.3**	**86.3**	**97.0**	**91.5**	**73.8**	**75.0**	**57.5**	**90.4**	**100.0**	**87.4**	**54.3**	**81.7**
Number of sessions attended by those who attended (%)												
1-3	24.5	12.7	9.2	14.9	66.1	13.3	44.6	16.4	16.2	15.4	19.3	20.7
4-6	35.3	77.8	3.9	13.0	13.6	33.3	29.2	19.2	13.5	26.0	39.8	24.5
7-9	19.6	6.4	10.0	9.3	8.5	0.0	6.2	13.5	12.2	26.9	11.4	12.5
10-19	18.6	3.2	29.2	28.6	8.5	23.3	13.9	32.7	41.9	24.0	26.1	24.4
20-29	0.0	0.0	14.6	25.5	1.7	10.0	6.2	12.5	12.2	2.9	1.1	9.6
30-39	1.0	0.0	10.8	5.6	1.7	10.0	0.0	5.8	1.4	1.9	0.0	3.8
40 or more	1.0	0.0	22.3	3.1	0.0	10.0	0.0	0.0	2.7	2.9	2.3	4.6
Average number of sessions attended by those who attended	7.0	4.9	26.4	15.4	5.0	14.9	5.9	11.6	12.2	9.2	7.9	12.1
Still active in last month of follow-up (%)	16.7	11.1	46.9	6.8	39.0	56.7	41.5	26.9	4.1	27.9	42.1	26.5
Ever participated in basic education (%)	**21.2**	**39.7**	**2.2**	**9.1**	**28.8**	**7.5**	**98.2**	**3.5**	**4.1**	**7.6**	**86.4**	**30.4**
Number of sessions attended by those who attended (%)												
1-3	20.8	58.6	0.0	6.3	34.8	33.3	38.7	0.0	0.0	11.1	2.9	21.9
4-6	12.5	10.3	0.0	6.3	17.4	0.0	14.4	0.0	0.0	11.1	4.3	9.3
7-9	16.7	0.0	0.0	18.8	26.1	33.3	8.1	0.0	66.7	0.0	3.6	8.2
10-19	25.0	17.2	0.0	18.8	17.4	0.0	14.4	0.0	33.3	11.1	23.6	18.9
20-29	20.8	6.9	33.3	18.8	4.4	33.3	8.1	25.0	0.0	11.1	20.7	14.5
30-39	4.2	6.9	0.0	12.5	0.0	0.0	2.7	25.0	0.0	33.3	15.0	9.0
40 or more	0.0	0.0	66.7	18.8	0.0	0.0	13.5	50.0	0.0	22.2	30.0	18.1
Average number of sessions attended by those who attended	11.7	8.2	34.7	23.1	7.3	10.3	13.7	44.3	8.7	29.9	29.2	19.9
Still active in last month of follow-up (%)	45.8	65.5	100.0	43.8	30.4	66.7	30.6	75.0	33.3	44.4	54.3	45.8

(continued)

TABLE 7.4 (continued)

Measure	Alabama	Florida	Massa-chusetts	Michigan	Minnesota Anoka	Minnesota Dakota	Missouri	New Jersey	Ohio Butler	Ohio Mont.	Tennessee	All Sites
Ever participated in skills training (%)	**3.5**	**9.6**	**3.7**	**10.2**	**23.8**	**25.0**	**2.7**	**7.0**	**1.4**	**4.2**	**14.8**	**8.7**
Number of sessions attended by those who attended (%)												
1-3	25.0	28.6	0.0	22.2	26.3	10.0	66.7	25.0	0.0	80.0	4.2	21.2
4-6	25.0	28.6	20.0	0.0	5.3	10.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	37.5	14.4
7-9	0.0	28.6	20.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	8.3	4.8
10-19	0.0	0.0	20.0	5.6	26.3	40.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	4.2	11.5
20-29	0.0	0.0	20.0	0.0	5.3	0.0	0.0	12.5	0.0	0.0	20.8	7.7
30-39	0.0	14.3	0.0	16.7	0.0	20.0	0.0	0.0	100.0	20.0	20.8	12.5
40 or more	50.0	0.0	20.0	55.6	36.8	20.0	33.3	62.5	0.0	0.0	4.2	27.9
Average number of sessions attended by those who attended	29.0	8.1	24.2	41.6	29.5	28.7	18.3	43.1	30.0	7.2	17.3	26.6
Still active in last month of follow-up (%)	50.0	14.3	40.0	61.1	63.2	50.0	33.3	50.0	0.0	20.0	70.8	53.9
Ever participated in OJT (%)	**11.5**	**1.4**	**11.2**	**4.6**	**6.3**	**10.0**	**10.6**	**16.5**	**0.0**	**7.6**	**8.0**	**8.3**
Number of sessions attended by those who attended (%)												
1-3	7.7	0.0	6.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	5.3	-- (a)	11.1	0.0	4.0
4-6	7.7	0.0	13.3	12.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	10.5	--	0.0	15.4	8.1
7-9	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	20.0	0.0	8.3	0.0	--	11.1	7.7	4.0
10-19	7.7	100.0	33.3	25.0	20.0	25.0	41.7	10.5	--	0.0	46.2	24.2
20-29	7.7	0.0	26.7	37.5	20.0	50.0	8.3	21.1	--	0.0	23.1	19.2
30-39	7.7	0.0	0.0	25.0	0.0	0.0	16.7	10.5	--	0.0	7.7	8.1
40 or more	61.5	0.0	20.0	0.0	40.0	25.0	25.0	42.1	--	77.8	0.0	32.3
Average number of sessions attended by those who attended	44.8	10.0	26.7	22.0	27.8	35.0	26.2	35.1	--	40.1	15.1	30.2
Still active in last month of follow-up (%)	76.9	100.0	46.7	0.0	80.0	75.0	83.3	68.4	--	88.9	61.5	64.7
Sample size	113	73	134	176	80	40	113	115	74	119	162	1,199

SOURCE: MDRC calculations from PFS Management Information System data.

NOTES: Includes all noncustodial parents referred to Parents' Fair Share through February 28, 1993, who participated in an employment and training activity within four months of referral.

Employment and training activities include basic education, job search/job-readiness, skills training, and on-the-job training (OJT).

(a) No participants were placed in OJT positions in Butler County.

parents who participated in each of the major types of employment and training activities, and the percentage of these participants who were still active in the specified activity in the final month of follow-up. The last column of the table shows that the average number of job club sessions attended among those who attended this activity was about 12, compared to averages of about 20 sessions for basic education attenders, 27 sessions for skills training participants, and 30 sessions (that is, days of work) for those placed in OJT positions. The proportion of participants still active in the final month of follow-up followed the same pattern, ranging from 27 percent of job club attenders to 65 percent of OJT attenders. These results might be expected because job search/job-readiness activities are usually relatively brief and often lead to employment, while education and training activities are, by their nature, likely to involve longer time commitments.[25] Given these figures, it is not surprising that the average number of sessions attended was much higher in Tennessee, where most participants attended basic education, than in Ohio, where most attended only job search/job-readiness activities.

Although the association between activity-specific participation patterns and the overall intensity of the employment component (measured in terms of sessions attended) was clearly strong, the county-level data shown in Table 7.4 suggest that other factors were also at work. First, these data suggest that the definitions of and expectations for specific types of activities varied to some extent across sites. For example, the site with the second-highest average number of sessions, Massachusetts, relied heavily on job search/job-readiness activities during the period covered by these data. One-third of job search/job-readiness participants in this site attended 30 or more sessions. This would have been impossible in some other sites, where these activities lasted only 3 or 4 weeks.

Second, there is strong evidence that some sites had more success than others in retaining participants in education and training activities. For example, while nearly half of the basic education participants in Tennessee attended 30 or more sessions (and 54 percent were still active in the final month of follow-up), participants in sites such as Alabama, Florida, and Missouri were much more likely to have attended basic education for fewer than 20 sessions.

3. **Short-Term, Program-Reported Employment Rates.** Table 7.5 shows the percentage of noncustodial parents referred to PFS who reported employment to program staff within 4 months of the referral. These figures do not provide a full picture of employment because they measure only

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[25]To provide some context for these figures: A typical job club workshop consisted of 10 to 20 sessions over 2 to 4 weeks; basic education and skills training classes met anywhere from 3 to 5 times per week for several months; and OJT positions usually involved 5 days of work per week for 3 to 4 months. However, in interpreting the figures in Table 7.4, it is important to note that individuals often did not start education and training activities or OJT positions immediately upon entering the PFS program. Thus, the session attendance figures may in fact have captured attendance over a period much shorter than 4 months.

TABLE 7.5

PROGRAM – REPORTED EMPLOYMENT RATES WITHIN FOUR MONTHS OF REFERRAL AMONG NONCUSTODIAL PARENTS REFERRED TO PARENTS' FAIR SHARE

Measure	Alabama	Florida	Massa-chusetts	Michigan	Minnesota Anoka	Minnesota Dakota	Missouri	New Jersey	Ohio Butler	Ohio Mont.	Tennessee	All Sites
Ever reported employment(%)	35.3	33.8	17.1	18.7	37.2	41.0	12.1	8.1	34.3	20.1	18.1	22.3
Starting wage for those who reported employment (%)												
Under $5 per hour	56.4	30.0	10.3	25.6	3.5	0.0	23.5	0.0	37.0	32.4	31.5	25.1
$5 – $6.99 per hour	27.3	48.0	43.6	56.1	51.7	46.5	58.8	50.0	37.0	39.4	51.9	45.8
$7 – $9.99 per hour	7.3	14.0	35.9	18.3	22.4	27.9	17.7	35.0	15.2	19.7	11.1	19.1
$10 – $14.99 per hour	0.0	4.0	5.1	0.0	12.1	14.0	0.0	5.0	6.5	2.8	0.0	4.3
$15 or more per hour	0.0	0.0	2.6	0.0	1.7	2.3	0.0	5.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.8
Average starting wage ($) (a)	4.98	5.64	6.96	5.78	7.16	7.64	5.92	7.33	5.64	5.74	5.43	6.07
Sample size	156	148	228	438	156	105	140	247	134	354	298	2,404

SOURCE: MDRC calculations from PFS Management Information System data.

NOTES: Includes all noncustodial parents referred to Parents' Fair Share through February 28, 1993.
Distributions may not add up to 100.0 percent because of rounding or missing items.
(a) Dollar averages do not include noncustodial parents who were missing wage information.

job entries that were reported to PFS program staff.[26] Staff were likely to know about jobs participants obtained directly through program activities but were less likely to hear about noncustodial parents who were referred to PFS and obtained jobs on their own without participating in the program (or participants who dropped out of the program and subsequently found employment). Although these "unassisted" placements may have been partly attributable to PFS – the noncustodial parent may have found employment to avoid the program – they would often not have been recorded in the Management Information System (MIS) MDRC used to collect data on participants' activities.[27]

The overall rate of program-reported employment was about 22 percent; the rate in individual sites ranged from about 8 percent in New Jersey to 41 percent in Dakota County, Minnesota. The overall average starting wage was just over $6 per hour; about one-fourth of the jobs paid $7 per hour or more and another one-fourth paid less than $5 per hour. The average starting wage in each site ranged from less than $5 per hour in Alabama to $7.64 per hour in Dakota County, Minnesota. It seems clear that the employment rates in certain sites would have been higher if additional months of follow-up data had been available; Table 7.3 showed that more than 40 percent of participants were still active in PFS employment and training activities in the final month of follow-up. Indeed, the overall employment rate was nearly 28 (rather than 22) percent for those noncustodial parents for whom 6 (rather than 4) months of follow-up data were available.[28]

Although it is certainly possible that some sites were simply more proficient than others in helping participants find jobs, there are several other possible explanations for the wide variation from site to site in employment and starting wage rates. These include:

- **Data issues.** The available data were not equally complete in all sites. Specifically, it is very likely that the figures were understated in the sites where substantial numbers of referred individuals did not enter the MIS, notably in Montgomery County, Ohio, and Tennessee.[29] Thus, in actuality, the cross-site differences may have been smaller than is suggested by Table 7.5.

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[26]Plans for Phase II of the demonstration include tracking employment through state wage-reporting data.

[27]Some of the jobs that were not reported to PFS program staff may have been detected at some later point by the CSE system; however, it is far from certain that this information would have been transferred back to PFS staff and reported to MDRC.

[28]The additional 2 months of data pertained to those referred to PFS relatively early in the pilot phase – through December 1992. It is possible that this earlier group may have differed in some respects from the full sample examined in the rest of this chapter.

[29]These sites completed the Enrollment Form only for noncustodial parents who attended a PFS orientation (that is, who were not only *referred* to PFS, but also *participated* in the program, at least to the extent of attending orientation). Since the MIS that provided information on attendance and job entries covered only individuals who completed the Enrollment Form, many of those who failed to show up to orientation were not included in the system in these sites. As noted above, some noncustodial parents who were referred to PFS found jobs on their own and never attended a program orientation.

- **Economic conditions.** Table 1.2 noted that unemployment rates ranged from a high of 9.0 percent in the Springfield, Massachusetts, area, to a low of 4.5 percent in the Minneapolis-St.Paul, Minnesota, area during the study period. It may have been more difficult for participants to find jobs in areas with depressed labor markets. Similarly, prevailing wage rates, minimum wage laws, and the cost of living all vary in different regions of the country, which may help to explain the disparity in starting wage rates.

- **Participant characteristics.** The job-readiness of the participants in different sites may have varied in measurable or unmeasurable ways. A site working with a population facing more barriers to employment may have recorded a lower short-term employment rate. For example, the New Jersey caseload was younger than average and had lower-than-average school completion rates. On the other hand, a site such as Minnesota, where a substantial proportion of participants were already employed at the point of the referral, probably had a "head start" on the other sites.

Finally, it seems clear that the employment rates are tied to some extent to the activity-specific participation rates shown in Table 7.2. Although the pattern is far from perfect, the employment rate tended to be above average in sites such as Alabama, Florida, and Butler County, Ohio, where most participants engaged in job search activities, and lower than average in sites such as Tennessee and Missouri, where fewer participants received these services.[30] This is logical, since job search/job-readiness activities are typically designed to lead directly and quickly to employment, while basic education (a longer-term activity) is not. Additional follow-up would be needed to assess the payoff of longer-term services.

C. Explaining the Participation Patterns

Overall, the data presented above confirm the feasibility of moving noncustodial parents into employment and training activities and monitoring their attendance. However, the nature and intensity of the employment and training services participants received during the early months of the pilot (the focus of the previous section's discussion) varied considerably from site to site. In several sites, virtually all employment and training participants received only relatively short-term job search/job-readiness services. Participants in most of these sites did not have a very intensive employment and training experience, although many did find jobs. A few sites were more successful in exposing participants to skill-building activities (typically basic education) that tended to be more intensive.

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[30]It is also important to note that these employment figures included only unsubsidized jobs; OJT placements were not included. Thus, sites such as New Jersey, which placed relatively large numbers of participants into OJT slots, would have been expected to have had lower rates of unsubsidized employment.

However, the ability of these sites to retain participants in these activities varied. None of the sites was able to move as many participants as planned into OJT positions, and relatively few participants entered classroom skills training. Several operational issues help to account for these patterns; three are discussed below.

1. **Activity Assignment Policies.** The procedures used to determine participants' first employment and training activity are probably the single most important factor in explaining the early participation patterns. No two sites used exactly the same process to make this determination; however, two general patterns emerged during the demonstration's early months:

- **Up-front job search.** One group of sites assigned the vast majority of PFS participants to a fixed sequence beginning with a job-readiness or job search activity. For example, in Massachusetts, virtually all PFS participants began with a three-week pre-employment training class. After completing the class, participants either continued with supervised job search or were referred for an OJT placement or for other training or education. Similarly, virtually all participants in Florida, Michigan, New Jersey, and Butler County, Ohio, were referred initially to a group job club. Participants who completed this activity without finding employment could, in theory, be referred for education, training, or further job search, although the procedures for this transition were not always clearly articulated.

- **Initial assessment or appraisal.** In the other sites, the first activity assignment depended on the results of an initial assessment or appraisal of the participant's characteristics, aptitudes, and/or interests. For example, in Missouri, participants were assessed during orientation and a three-week peer support program. Those who lacked a high school diploma or could not read at the tenth-grade level were generally assigned to adult basic education classes; upon completion, they were referred to the JTPA agency for OJT placement. Those who did not begin with education were referred for OJT placement immediately after peer support. Alabama, Minnesota, and Montgomery County, Ohio, and Tennessee also used an initial assessment or appraisal to determine the first assignment, but the criteria in these sites were defined less sharply than in Missouri and could theoretically have led in any one of several directions.

The design and implementation of these procedures reflected the overall program philosophy and previous experience of the lead agency in each site. The sites that opted for an up-front job search strategy apparently felt that it was important to let the labor market identify those participants who could benefit from education or training; many of these sites had previously operated JOBS programs or other initiatives with a strong focus on job search activities.

The assignment procedures in the sites that used initial assessments or appraisals were, in principle, more flexible. However, the day-to-day implementation of these procedures was similarly

guided by the overall program emphasis and the previous experience of the staff involved. Thus, in Missouri and Tennessee – both sites that entered PFS with a strong focus on basic education – the assessment usually resulted in a referral to this activity. In contrast, participants in Montgomery County, Ohio, almost always began with job club; this was consistent with the usual pattern in the county's JOBS program.

The first activity assignment was critical because, as noted earlier, most employment and training participants attended only one type of activity. This was particularly true of those who began with job search/job-readiness activities; these individuals often found employment or left the program before moving to a second activity.[31] This result probably reflected the pressure on participants to find work quickly,[32] the inability of most sites to clearly define the next step for individuals who failed to find jobs during the initial activity, and the limited availability of other kinds of services (as discussed shortly). It also underscores the difficulty of balancing a focus on immediate employment with an effort to identify participants with training needs.

2. **Institutional Issues.** As expected, the organizational characteristics of both JOBS and JTPA agencies shaped the employment and training component in the PFS sites. The early pilot experience illustrates the difficulty inherent in any attempt to change long-established institutional behavior patterns.

PFS reflects a broader debate between "labor force attachment" and "human capital development" approaches to the JOBS program. In some sites, including Florida and Ohio, JOBS programs that had previously stressed job search activities continued this emphasis in PFS. This shaped both the service network and the activity assignment procedures, and ensured that most participants in these sites would receive job search services. In contrast, the Missouri and Tennessee JOBS programs, which had previously stressed basic education, transferred this emphasis into PFS. Sites such as Massachusetts and New Jersey were less influenced by the previous nature of the local JOBS program because the PFS programs were run by nonprofit agencies that were only indirectly linked to JOBS.

As expected, agencies funded through the JTPA system were slated to be important providers of skill-building services in most sites. This was true particularly for OJT, a service with which most

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[31]Although PFS participation was mandatory, some participants stopped attending program activities. As explained in earlier chapters, the consequences for noncooperation varied from site to site.

[32]As described in Chapter 6, the treatment of participants' child support orders during the period of PFS participation varied considerably from site to site. Some sites completely suspended the obligation, while others did not routinely make changes.

JTPA agencies have extensive experience. In nearly every site, the local JTPA entity agreed to serve, initially, a specific number of PFS participants, either under contract (using JOBS funds) or directly (using JTPA funds).

In fact, the level of JTPA involvement in most sites was lower than anticipated. In some cases, JTPA agencies maintained that many PFS participants could not be certified eligible for JTPA because they were living with relatives who refused to provide household income information.[33] In other cases, JTPA staff frankly stated that the PFS population was "too risky" to serve in expensive activities, given the SDAs' performance standards and ongoing relationships with employers (other SDAs reported that the PFS population was fairly similar to their regular service population).

The most immediate consequence of this limited JTPA involvement was to narrow participants' access to OJT and skills training. As noted earlier, prior to the start-up of program operations, each site agreed to place at least 100 PFS participants into OJT positions during the pilot phase; JTPA agencies were usually made responsible for meeting this goal. MDRC expected that the level of OJT activity would be low at first, but would increase within a few months after program start-up. However, by the end of January 1993, only 55 people across all nine sites had been placed in OJT positions. One site, Missouri, had 12 OJT placements; no other site had more than 8. Although the pace eventually picked up (see below), no site was likely to have reached its initial goal by the end of the pilot phase. The level of participation in classroom skills training was also fairly low.

A variety of explanations was offered for the relative lack of success in moving PFS participants into JTPA-funded services.[34] Some JTPA staff pointed to the regulations governing OJTs funded under JTPA (described earlier in this chapter), contending that these requirements created onerous burdens and reduced the allowable length of many OJTs to the point that employers no longer found them appealing.[35] Anticipating this problem, several sites used JOBS funds to support OJTs developed by JTPA staff, since the rules governing this activity under JOBS are much less stringent. However, OJT placement rates were relatively low even in these sites.

Other JTPA staff suggested that a relatively small fraction of PFS participants qualified for skills

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[33]Even older individuals who are living with their parents may in some cases be required to count the full household income in determining JTPA eligibility. As noted in Chapter 2, few PFS participants lived alone. A similar result was observed in the Young Unwed Fathers Demonstration operated by Public/Private Ventures. See Watson, 1992.

[34]The information in this section on the perspectives of JTPA staff was obtained during field research, operational oversite activities, and a conference sponsored by the U.S. Department of Labor (described below).

[35]More broadly, critics of the OJT approach to serving disadvantaged groups have long maintained that the offer of a subsidy sends a signal to the employer that the potential employee is sub-par and reduces his or her chances of being hired.

training or an OJT placement, and questioned whether the emphasis on these services was appropriate for this population. For example, they contended that many PFS participants could not meet the entry requirements for skills training classes (which often require a high school diploma or GED). Similarly, some maintained that OJT is suitable for job-ready participants who lack a specific work skill, and said that most PFS participants faced more formidable barriers to employment such as very limited work experience, poor basic skills, and criminal records. These agencies generally did not attempt to develop the "high support" OJT model described earlier in this chapter, nor did they design alternatives for less job-ready participants.

Finally, in some sites, the activity assignment procedures described above effectively reduced the number of participants who were considered for OJT placement. Some sites did not develop clear criteria to identify participants who were suitable for OJT positions. Others, concerned about "wasting" OJT slots on participants who could easily obtain good jobs on their own, reserved the OJT option for participants who failed to find unsubsidized employment during an up-front job search activity. As noted earlier, these sites tended to discover that few participants remained active in the program after the job search component: Most had either found employment or dropped out of the program. This is not to suggest that employment is a negative outcome, but there was evidence that OJT placements tended to offer higher wages and better training opportunities than did unsubsidized jobs obtained through job search programs. As shown in Table 7.5, the average starting wage for participants placed in unsubsidized employment within four months of referral, just over $6 per hour, was almost identical to the average wage participants had received in their most recent job before being referred to PFS (see Table 3.1).

3. **Participants' Preferences.** Anecdotal evidence suggests that, as expected, many PFS participants expressed a strong preference for activities that led directly to employment and resisted classroom training or education. In fact, staff in some sites reported that some participants erroneously assumed that the program would provide them with a job and showed up to orientation asking when they would start work. These participants were reluctant to wait several weeks or months for the next cycle of a training course to begin and, in some cases, were even unwilling to wait to meet with a staff member to discuss an OJT placement. In a few sites, PFS case managers and other staff worked with participants during up-front peer support activities and succeeded in persuading many of them to consider other options. In other sites, case managers, perhaps more familiar with programs that stressed job search, made only limited attempts to persuade participants to give skill-building activities a chance.

III. The Evolution of the Employment and Training Component

The early patterns of participation in employment and training activities raised some important questions. The primary concern was that most sites appeared to be having difficulty delivering the broad menu of options described in the application guidelines. With relatively few noncustodial parents moving into classroom or on-the-job training, most participants were receiving only relatively short-term job search/job-readiness services; many were not remaining active in PFS for long periods.

On the one hand, this may seem like a positive result, since many of those with short stays in PFS found employment. On the other hand, there was concern that, without the benefit of skill-building activities, these individuals were not finding the kinds of jobs that would allow them to support themselves and meet their child support obligations. This concern, which was supported by the sites' own reports about the serious barriers facing many PFS participants, suggested that job retention would be a problem. Moreover, field observation suggested that the job search/job-readiness activities offered in several sites were not particularly intensive or interesting to participants; in some sites, participants seemed to drift into long periods of individual job search with little supervision.

The sites that assigned most participants to education activities were focused on building human capital. However, in these sites, there was a concern that participants were either becoming "stuck" in education programs for long periods without making progress or, at the opposite extreme, dropping out of these activities because they lacked income or commitment. This problem was exacerbated by the fact that most sites did not have clear or realistic criteria to determine when participants had completed basic education.[36]

This suggested that both sites stressing education and those emphasizing job search needed to expand and diversify their approaches.

A. Efforts to Promote Change

Midway through the pilot phase, senior MDRC staff visited each site to conduct a Program Review designed to identify operational problems and devise solutions. Following these meetings, sites were asked to develop specific plans to address the issues identified during the reviews. Regarding the employment and training component, MDRC emphasized that the following goals should guide this effort:

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[36]Difficulties in defining criteria for completion of education activities have also been observed in other mandatory education and employment programs such as California's Greater Avenues for Independence (GAIN) welfare-to-work program. See, for example, Martinson and Friedlander, 1994.

- **Broadening the menu of employment and training options.** All sites were encouraged to restructure their employment components to steer more participants toward skill-building activities, including OJT and activities mixing classroom training and/or education with income-producing work. Some sites clearly needed to find additional service providers to accomplish this task. Sites stressing basic education were encouraged to review their criteria for completion of these activities and to consider whether participants were really committed to this course.

- **Strengthening job clubs.** MDRC hired, as a consultant to the project, a firm with extensive experience developing high-quality job clubs. Representatives of this firm visited several of the PFS sites to train job club providers. In addition, sites that were relying heavily on job search/job-readiness activities were asked to make certain that procedures were in place to move participants into a second activity quickly if they failed to find employment within a few weeks.

- **Bolstering post-placement support.** Given the small number of OJT placements, and the concerns described above about the retention of participants in jobs obtained through job search and direct placement activities, MDRC asked sites to increase the level of follow-up and support provided to employed participants, including efforts to identify problems in the transition to work.[37]

- **Providing technical assistance with OJTs.** Consultants working under contract to MDRC visited all of the sites to provide intensive, tailored assistance in marketing OJTs to private sector employers.

- **Promoting the use of work experience.** As noted earlier, many site staff suggested that a substantial number of PFS participants were not ready for OJT placement. "Work experience," in the context of JTPA-funded programs, refers to opportunities for participants with limited employment histories to gain experience working in a minimum wage, temporary position with a public or nonprofit agency. The participants' wages are subsidized 100 percent using JTPA funds. Under previous JTPA rules, work experience was rarely utilized because its costs had to be charged as supportive services, a cost category for which spending is tightly controlled and funding is limited. However, new JTPA regulations, which became effective in July 1993, are designed to increase the attractiveness of work experience to JTPA agencies.

- **Increasing the involvement of JTPA agencies.** In April 1993, the U.S. Department of Labor hosted a meeting with representatives of the PFS SDAs to discuss their involvement in PFS. Senior staff from the Department emphasized the importance of PFS and its target population and urged local officials to

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[37]An important model for this effort was found in Project Match, an employment program for public assistance recipients living in a Chicago public housing project. Project Match was designed on the assumption that the route from welfare to self-sufficiency typically involves a series of steps, and that an initial job placement is often the beginning, rather than the end, of this process. See Herr and Halpern, 1991.

redouble their efforts to serve PFS participants. The Department also clarified several regulatory issues that were causing concern at the local level and offered other assistance and support as needed.[38]

As these steps suggest, the sites' early performance did not lead MDRC to abandon its emphasis on skill-building activities or OJT. Rather, MDRC sought to improve the capacity of sites to develop OJT positions, while simultaneously encouraging them to seek alternative means to achieve the same objective: mixing training with income-producing work. In addition, recognizing the key role of job search activities, MDRC sought to strengthen these services and to add post-placement support to bolster their effectiveness.

B. Site Responses

The sites responded by redesigning their employment and training service strategies. The key changes fell into four broad categories.

First, several sites strengthened their capacity to develop OJT slots and unsubsidized employment for PFS participants. In Florida and in both Ohio counties, responsibility for OJT development was largely removed from the JTPA agency.[39] In Florida and in Montgomery County, Ohio, this responsibility was brought in-house: The lead agency hired a job and/or OJT developer directly onto its own payroll. Butler County, Ohio, used program funds to purchase job development services from the local vocational school that already operated job clubs for both PFS and JOBS. New Jersey's Department of Labor replaced the OJT developer originally assigned to PFS with a more experienced staff person.

Second, a few sites added new activities designed to prepare more participants for OJT. Massachusetts piloted a two- to four-week pre-OJT career exploration program for participants who were not ready for immediate OJT placement. Participants received a stipend of $50 a week while in this program. Missouri's OJT contractor added a 25-hour job-readiness program for all participants referred for OJT placement. Michigan took steps to identify OJT candidates earlier, during their time in job club, rather than waiting for participants to complete job club before considering an OJT placement.

Third, most of the sites took steps to broaden and strengthen their skill-building offerings beyond OJT and to help identify participants who might be interested in these programs. Some sites

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[38]For example, the Department clarified rules on eligibility determination and on the documentation required for OJT placements.

[39]In both cases, the JTPA agencies pledged to remain involved as providers of skills training and other services to PFS participants.

looked beyond the JTPA system to find additional training providers. Michigan established a new linkage with a local nonprofit agency with experience providing intensive employment and training assistance to the disabled; this agency was contracted to serve PFS participants facing severe barriers to employment. In Florida, PFS funds were used to purchase a long-planned staff position at a local community college; this individual was given the responsibility of helping PFS participants move into the college's education and training programs. Missouri took a different approach, broadening its contract with the JTPA agency to include skills training, adding a new career exploration workshop, developing a new linkage with a vocational rehabilitation program for participants who were not making progress in basic education, and assigning a staff person from the state's Division of Employment Security to develop part-time jobs for PFS participants engaged in classroom activities.

Finally, several sites made changes to strengthen their job search activities (beyond receiving the technical assistance described earlier in this section). Massachusetts and Anoka County, Minnesota, created Resource Rooms for participants engaged in supervised job search; the facilities included telephones, computers, and information on job leads. Montgomery County, Ohio, transferred the job club contract to the agency that already provided peer support and stipulated that the job club must employ a person whose sole function was job development. Florida and Ohio developed structured group activities for participants engaged in individual job search. Other sites revised the curricula for their job clubs to make them more intensive and attractive to participants and designed more explicit policies for participants who completed job club without finding employment.

C. Results

The changes described in the previous section substantially expanded the menu of employment and training options available to PFS participants in most sites. The MIS data available for this report did not cover a long enough period to measure the efficacy of these steps. However, in at least one area – development of OJT positions – improvement was measurable. During the period from the beginning of the pilot through March 1993 (an average of nine months), there were a total of 97 OJT placements across all nine sites, an average of about 11 per month. During the next five months, the monthly average more than tripled, to more than 30 per month. One site, Massachusetts, had made a total of 66 OJT placements by the end of October 1993, and probably would have reached the goal of 100 had funding problems not delayed their OJT development activities. These data suggest that OJT is indeed a viable strategy for the PFS population.[40]

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[40]It is important to note that many of the OJT slots that were developed in PFS were supported with JOBS, rather than JTPA, funding. Thus, these positions may not have conformed to the strict JTPA guidelines.

IV. Conclusions

As expected, the pilot phase was a period of experimentation in the employment and training component. Most sites began with a fairly narrow approach, emphasizing only one kind of service, usually either job search or basic education. These activities were appropriate for some participants but seemed unlikely to meet the needs of others. Thus, during the course of the pilot, sites gradually expanded the menu of available options and improved the quality of their core services. By the end of the pilot, most sites seemed better able to offer a broader and more intensive array of employment and training options.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSIONS AND OPEN QUESTIONS

This chapter summarizes MDRC's conclusions based on the PFS pilot phase experience, highlights some of the implications of these results for the PFS service approach, and discusses a number of broader policy issues raised by PFS.

I. Overall Conclusions on the Feasibility and Promise of PFS

MDRC's decision to recommend a full-scale test of the impacts of PFS was based on three broad conclusions, reached after more than a year of close observation and the collection and analysis of considerable data on the operational performance of the pilot sites.

First, the pilot sites were able to recruit diverse institutional partners, build programs around the four core PFS components, and ensure that participants received a consistent message about the goals of PFS. Although smooth linkages took time to develop and organizational approaches varied substantially, the sites developed numerous strategies to reconcile divergent organizational cultures and ensure that participants did not receive mixed messages about the program's goals. As a result of these efforts, all sites were able to get PFS programs up and running, all four core components were put in place, and the program received consistent attention from staff in most of the key agencies as well as broad community and political support.

Second, most of the sites developed effective procedures to identify eligible noncustodial parents, move them into program services, and encourage and enforce regular participation. Although the pace of referrals was slow at first, the sites eventually developed routine systems that generated a total of more than 4,000 referrals by the fall of 1993. This required identifying a much larger number of nonpaying noncustodial parents because, as expected, many either failed to show up for scheduled hearings or appointments, or acknowledged that they were employed and agreed to pay child support without being referred to PFS.

About two-thirds of the noncustodial parents who were referred to PFS actually participated in an employment and training or peer support activity within four months of the referral. Considering that more than 95 percent of these parents were not engaging in any employment and training activities on their own at the time of the referral, this suggests a major increase in service receipt levels. Moreover, the PFS participation rate was higher than comparable rates measured by MDRC in

mandatory employment programs for welfare recipients that also imposed participation requirements on large numbers of individuals. Finally, most of the noncustodial parents who did not participate in PFS services either reported to program staff that they were employed or were referred to CSE staff for further enforcement action. The number of parents who "fell through the cracks" was relatively small.

Third, there were clear signs that PFS stimulated important changes in both individuals and systems. The quantitative data showed that a substantial share of those referred to PFS were actively engaged in program activities. The most dramatic signs of change appeared during the peer support sessions, which emerged as the heart of many of the PFS programs. Many participants quickly developed a strong attachment to this activity, and both group members and staff insisted that profound changes in both outlooks and behavior resulted. Participants frequently reported rediscovering their strong feelings for their children, which inspired them to work harder to obtain employment, pay child support regularly, and stay out of legal trouble.

Less dramatic but equally important changes occurred in the key institutions involved in PFS. Child support enforcement agencies started "working" cases that were typically neglected before PFS provided a constructive enforcement option. In addition to generating large numbers of referrals to PFS, this new focus uncovered a substantial amount of previously unreported income. Most of the sites developed procedures to routinely reduce the child support obligations of noncustodial parents during the period they were participating in PFS, and to raise these orders quickly if a parent failed to cooperate or found employment. This represented a major change, since support orders were rarely changed in this manner in the past. Finally, CSE agencies developed new systems to expedite the implementation of wage withholding orders for participants who found employment and to follow up quickly when noncustodial parents failed to participate in PFS as ordered. These individuals were returned to court and could be found in contempt. In most sites, these enhanced CSE efforts were facilitated by designating specific CSE staff to work with PFS cases.

Employment and training systems were more difficult to change, perhaps because these systems perceived that they were already prepared to serve the PFS population. A variety of institutional barriers and program design choices made it difficult for sites to build a broad menu of service options for PFS participants. As a result, the nature, quality, and intensity of the employment and training services participants received varied dramatically from site to site. In general, too many participants received only short-term job search assistance, and too few received classroom or on-the-job training or education. On the positive side, several sites identified strong nonprofit employment and training

providers with experience serving individuals facing serious barriers to employment, and the menu of employment and training options became broader over time. Moreover, the pace of OJT placement accelerated greatly during the later months of the pilot.

Together, these conclusions confirm that PFS is indeed a feasible and promising policy approach that deserves a rigorous impact test.

II. Implications for the PFS Service Approach

The pilot phase generally confirmed the appropriateness of the PFS service approach. Thus, MDRC recommended that all four core components – with some modifications – continue to be included during Phase II of the demonstration. In addition, it may be possible to reduce the level of variation in site approaches in order to create a more standardized "model" that builds on the lessons of the pilot phase.

Qualitative and quantitative information on the target population illustrates its diversity and confirms that an array of employment and training services – including skill-building activities – is indeed necessary. The experience of the pilot sites demonstrates that such a package – including a focus on on-the-job training (OJT) – is difficult, but possible, to assemble. In addition, sites were encouraged to supplement OJT with other activities mixing training and work, and to increase the level of post-placement follow-up to bolster job retention.

The picture of the noncustodial parents that emerged during the pilot phase also confirmed the rationale behind the peer support component. It seems clear that a program based solely on employment and training services would have difficulty engaging many noncustodial parents and, in many cases, would not lead to regular child support payments. Several of the pilot sites would have had serious problems if peer support had not succeeded in building the credibility of PFS. Sites discovered the importance of placing participants into peer support groups before they begin employment and training activities and to create opportunities for participants to remain involved with these groups for long periods.

Mediation was clearly underutilized during the pilot phase. Noncustodial parents were reluctant to request services and, when they did, custodial parents often failed to cooperate. This is consistent with the results of other studies of voluntary mediation programs.[1] Nevertheless, it still seems

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[1]Most previous research on mediation has focused on divorced or separated couples. These studies have typically found that many couples choose not to participate in voluntary mediation programs. Moreover, (continued...)

254

important to provide opportunities for mediation; and late in the pilot, sites began to experiment with ways to promote greater use of this service.

The need for enhanced child support enforcement was confirmed by the very fact that sites needed to adopt special measures such as designated staff and special court dockets in order to identify, refer, monitor, and follow up on PFS cases. It is clear that the system could not have supported PFS without these steps.

III. Critical Questions

Parents' Fair Share has captured the imagination of many observers. Despite the lack of information on program impacts and cost-effectiveness, the project has attracted an unusual level of media attention and has already begun to influence the national policy debate. PFS is appealing because it simultaneously addresses a number of vexing social problems and exemplifies the mutual obligation approach to social policy that has received broad political support in recent years. Specifically, the project offers the hope of achieving two highly desirable but seemingly contradictory objectives: toughening the CSE system and offering assistance to poor noncustodial parents.

Although PFS clearly offers exciting possibilities, MDRC realized that it was important to step back and carefully examine the full implications of the PFS approach and the kinds of impacts the program might produce before recommending that Phase II go forward. This examination revealed a set of unusually complex and in some cases surprising policy questions. Some of these questions can be answered, or at least informed, through careful impact and process research, while others raise more fundamental issues of fairness and equity that must be resolved through a broad debate about policy objectives and societal values.

This section describes some of the key questions raised by PFS. It begins by discussing questions that the research can address at least to some extent, and then moves on to describe a set of critical issues on which research can offer only limited guidance.

A. Does PFS Make a Difference?

Now that the pilot phase experience has shown that PFS is feasible and promising, the next key

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[1](...continued)
several studies have found that rates of participation are correlated with socioeconomic status; low-income couples are less likely to mediate and less likely to reach agreement when they do try. See Pearson, 1993; Pearson and Thoennes, 1989.

question is clearly: Does it make a difference? The random assignment evaluation planned for Phase II of the demonstration is designed to answer this question by assessing the impact of PFS on the noncustodial parents' earnings, employment rates, and child support payments; the custodial parents' welfare receipt and household income; and measures of the children's well-being.

So that this assessment can be made, individuals who meet the eligibility criteria for PFS will be assigned, at random, to either a program group, which will remain eligible for the program, or a control group, which will be ineligible for the program. The two groups will then be tracked over time and compared on a number of relevant outcomes. Because the groups will be created through a random process, there will be no systematic differences between them except for the fact that only the program group will have access to PFS. Thus, any differences in subsequent behavior between the two groups can confidently be attributed to PFS. Given the broad interest in PFS and the issues it addresses, this type of rigorous study should provide valuable information to policymakers.

B. What Drives the Impacts?

The impact analysis described above will almost certainly yield reliable estimates of the program's effects. However, the story is likely to be complex. If PFS does generate impacts, it will be critical to understand the mechanism that produced them. In the two examples discussed below, different interpretations might lead to quite different policy conclusions.

1. Smoke-out Versus Services. As noted earlier, PFS may increase child support payments in two ways. First, the employment and training and peer support services may lead to increases in noncustodial parents' earnings, which are then translated into greater and more regular child support payments. Second, PFS may "smoke out" previously unreported earnings by offering CSE agencies a vehicle for working cases that were previously neglected.

The service approach developed for the pilot phase (and recommended for Phase II) implicitly assumes that both kinds of effects are possible. However, if the history of employment and training programs for men is any indication, there is a real possibility that such services will not yield significant impacts. That is why employment and training activities are supplemented with peer support in PFS. However, if all or most of the program's effect is driven by smoke-out, one might conclude that an intensive, expensive service package is in fact unnecessary. Some type of service referral might be required to give courts and CSE agencies an option for disposing of cases, but the primary objective of the services would be to disrupt noncustodial parents' off-the-books work schedules. Of course, one might also conclude that services *could* produce impacts but that the

specific package tested in PFS was inappropriate; this would lead to a different policy recommendation. It seems vital to develop a research design for Phase II that can separate these two kinds of effects in at least some of the sites.

2. **Formal Versus Informal Earnings and Child Support.** It seems clear that both custodial and noncustodial parents of children on welfare have strong incentives to handle child support informally and that a large, albeit unmeasurable, amount of underground work and child support now take place. It is possible that PFS will produce a shift from informal to formal activity by moving noncustodial parents from underground into mainstream jobs (or uncovering unreported earnings) and deducting child support directly from their paychecks.

Although this is clearly a positive result from the government budget perspective, the implications for participants and their children are less clear; a shift from one type of earnings or support to another is clearly not the same as a net increase. In fact, as discussed in the next section, given the current system for handling support payments for children receiving AFDC, a shift from informal to formal support could decrease the resources available to children, at least in the short term. While it is fairly straightforward to measure increases in formal activity through administrative records, it will require some creative data collection techniques to assess whether these represent net increases or shifts from one sector to the other.

C. How Will PFS Affect Children?

One might assume that a program that generates an increase in formal child support payments would have an unambiguously positive impact on children. After all, children are clearly better off when they have access to greater financial resources. Moreover, studies have shown that child support – as opposed to other income sources – is associated with positive outcomes such as children's educational attainment.[2]

However, despite this evidence, there are several reasons to remain cautious. First, as long as the custodial parent remains on welfare, she and the children will not actually receive more than $50 a month in child support (the rest – if any – would go to the government as reimbursement for her welfare payments). Thus, if support payments increase but are still not high enough to close the custodial parent's AFDC case, the primary beneficiary will be the government. In fact, to the extent that PFS results in a substitution of formal for informal child support, the custodial parent and children

[2]See, for example, Knox, 1993.

may experience a net loss in income. Of course, when custodial parents do go to work and leave welfare – most leave the rolls within two years of applying – more regular child support payments may make the difference between poverty and self-sufficiency and help reduce welfare recidivism. Those who do leave the rolls will begin to receive the full amount of child support that is collected.

Second, although payment of child support seems to be positively associated with several measures of children's well-being, this does not necessarily mean that increasing child support payments will improve the lives of children. Under the current system, noncustodial parents, unfortunately, have some discretion about whether to pay child support because enforcement is not universal. In this environment, those who pay are likely to be more strongly committed to their children and better able to get along with the custodial parents than are those who do not. Put another way: Noncustodial parents who do not care about their children or cannot get along with the custodial parents often do not pay support. This suggests that it may be the characteristics of the noncustodial parents who pay (or of their children), rather than the child support payments per se, that are causing the positive child outcomes.

If this is true, policies that succeed in getting some of the current nonpayers to pay more may not have positive consequences for children. Indeed, one study suggests that forcing more noncustodial parents to pay child support may reduce children's well-being by increasing conflict between parents. For unmarried parents, the authors predict that the costs of conflict may outweigh the benefits of greater financial resources.[3] PFS implicitly acknowledges this possibility through its inclusion of peer support and mediation, which are designed to address the potential negative side effects that may accompany increased payment levels. In Phase II, it should be possible to obtain some information about the children's well-being through a survey of custodial parents.

D. What Are the Implications for National Child Support Enforcement Policy?

The enhanced CSE system that took shape in the PFS pilot sites is different in many ways from the current system. CSE agencies started working cases they had previously neglected and, in many sites, temporarily reducing child support obligations to ensure that noncustodial parents' support orders reflected their ability to pay. Moreover, the system actively encouraged these parents to build their earning power rather than attempting to maximize short-term collections. These measures may seem both farsighted and fair. However, as models for national policy, they raise several difficult issues

[3]McLanahan et al., forthcoming.

that have been part of the national debate over child support enforcement for some time.

1. **Working All Cases.** Working all AFDC child support cases – including those with no sign of income – sends an important message about parental responsibility and is clearly consistent with current federal rules that require agencies to take some action on all cases within prescribed time limits. But is this level of effort cost-effective? These cases are likely to demand repeated location efforts and enforcement activities, and, even with the combined effects of smoke-out and PFS services, it is unclear whether collections will increase enough to offset the higher costs. Some would argue that it makes more sense to focus scarce enforcement resources on the large group of noncustodial parents who live and work in the mainstream economy and simply refuse to pay support.

2. **Temporary Reductions.** Temporarily reducing the support orders of PFS participants is also consistent with recent trends to the extent that it makes child support obligations reflect the noncustodial parent's ability to pay. This notion seems attractive in principle but presents practical problems when considered as a broader policy. For example, it is not clear over what time period "ability to pay" should be assessed. A noncustodial parent who has recently lost his job may have limited ability to pay support now. But it seems both impractical and unwise to immediately reduce a support order every time a noncustodial parent becomes unemployed; most of these parents will be working again soon, and the government must be careful not to create a perverse incentive for them to stay out of work. Moreover, their children's financial needs will not disappear in the interim. Thus, many states' child support guidelines and practices do not support such an approach; they examine income over an extended time period in determining a parent's ability to pay or impute child support orders for unemployed parents based on the minimum wage or some other standard.

A strong argument can be made that a different approach is needed to encourage PFS parents to build their earning power and cooperate more readily with the CSE system. However, in the environment described above, implementing the PFS policy of routine reductions has required judges to deviate from their states' guidelines and usual practices for handling these cases. Careful monitoring has been needed to ensure that noncustodial parents' orders are quickly increased in response to noncompliance or employment. Ironically, to some extent this represents a return to the case-by-case approach that characterized child support enforcement in the past, and suggests that replication may be difficult. Moreover, if routine reductions are not suitable in all instances in which noncustodial parents become unemployed, how should the system determine when they are appropriate? The Phase II analysis of PFS program operations may provide some lessons on "best practices" in this area.

Finally, a serious focus on ability to pay has broader implications. For example, it suggests that states may need to review their child support guidelines. As discussed in Chapter 6, most of these formulas make no allowance for the subsistence needs of noncustodial parents, and many take a disproportionate share of income from noncustodial parents working in low-wage jobs. In addition, other state and local policies, such as charging noncustodial parents for birth-related medical expenses and welfare costs incurred by custodial parents before paternity was established, are not tied to ability to pay.

3. **Mutual Obligation.** The very notion of adding opportunities to match the existing CSE obligation has far-reaching and complex implications. This approach seems vital to alleviate the negative side effects of a tighter enforcement system. As it becomes more difficult to work in the mainstream economy and avoid paying child support, noncustodial parents who are willing to live and work outside the system may be even more likely to do so. The social cost of this result seems high, but is it appropriate to "reward" noncompliance with special opportunities? What sort of message does this send to noncustodial parents who currently work and pay regularly? Moreover, in the final analysis, it is not clear whether it will be possible to draw noncustodial parents "above ground" and keep them there as long as most of the child support payments collected for children on welfare are retained by the state.

E. What Are the Implications for National Employment and Training Policy?

The history of employment and training programs for men has not produced many promising models. In fact, several programs that produced modest impacts for disadvantaged women had little or no effect for men. Thus, policymakers and researchers are still struggling to learn what works for this population. PFS could play an important role in this effort.

The PFS employment and training approach, although not defined in great detail, is based on a few promising results from past studies and on the practical needs of the PFS target group. In general, PFS employment services are designed to serve a diverse group of men, and to balance their need for skill-building services with their strong desire for jobs and immediate income. As discussed in Chapter 7, SWIM and GAIN, two mandatory welfare-to-work programs, produced some positive impacts for mostly male AFDC-U recipients using a combination of job search and education/training services. The National JTPA Study found positive impacts during a 30-month follow-up period for adult men deemed appropriate for on-the-job training (OJT). The PFS impact analysis will help policymakers understand whether a mandatory program based on a menu of these activities,

supplemented with peer support, can produce positive effects for an important group of disadvantaged men who owe child support.

In addition to testing the impacts of the PFS service package, the Phase II evaluation may also provide important lessons about operating employment and training programs for this group. For example, if it provides further evidence that OJT can be an effective service strategy for disadvantaged men, the PFS experience may highlight some promising strategies for using this service with individuals who face more serious barriers to employment than typical OJT candidates. It may also offer lessons about ways to ensure that OJT provides serious training but is also attractive to employers. Recent federal policies, designed to bolster the quality of OJT, have led many SDAs to de-emphasize this service; the PFS pilot sites increasingly came to rely on JOBS funds to support the OJT slots they generated.

More generally, to the extent that JTPA agencies are key service providers, PFS will help researchers document the experience of serving mandatory participants in a system set up primarily for volunteers. The project will also provide further evidence about how the system can work effectively with seriously disadvantaged participants. The 1992 JTPA amendments were an important step in this direction, but it was too early to assess their impact on local operations during the pilot phase. Thus, PFS – with its focus on a risky target group and its use of OJT – will be at the cutting edge of policy changes designed to make the JTPA system more responsive to the needs of seriously disadvantaged men.

F. Is PFS Fair?

PFS means different things to different people. Some see the project as a rare opportunity to provide employment and training help to low-income minority men, a group that has suffered disproportionately from economic shifts over the past two decades. Others see it as a means to make the mandate to pay child support real by giving CSE agencies the means to enforce cases they previously neglected. Still others see PFS as an opportunity to expose what they see as the CSE system's anti-father bias and its fundamental unfairness to low-income noncustodial parents.

On the one hand, the program's chameleon-like quality has helped it gain support from individuals and groups with sharply different perspectives. This is possible as long as each group believes that the program's benefits outweigh its costs, as they see them. On the other hand, it is not always possible to maintain this delicate balance, and PFS has been subject to several types of criticism.

For example, some advocates for children and custodial parents contend that PFS weakens the obligation to pay child support. These groups have fought for years to persuade society and government to take child support more seriously, and some see PFS as an inappropriate attempt to make this obligation "conditional" on government assistance for noncustodial parents. Others support PFS in theory, but argue that in a world of scarce resources, funds devoted to noncustodial parents will inevitably be diverted from custodial parents. Ideally, PFS would be part of a two-parent JOBS program, but few of the pilot sites have consciously attempted to make this connection.[4]

In a sharply different kind of critique, some have suggested that PFS is an extension of a CSE and criminal justice system that is unfair to members of minority groups and low-income people in general. While possibly conceding that PFS is a step in the right direction, they maintain that the program basically accepts the system as is.

IV. Concluding Thoughts

The results of the multifaceted evaluation planned for Phase II of the demonstration will be a valuable contribution to national social policy. Rigorous research will help provide answers to many of the key questions raised by this initiative: Can a package of employment and training and other services raise the earnings of disadvantaged noncustodial parents? Do some groups of parents benefit more than others from such services? Is it possible to translate higher earnings into greater child support payments? How does PFS affect the relationships between noncustodial parents and their children? What are the benefits and costs of this approach for taxpayers, parents, children, and society? What lessons can be learned from the programs' operational experience that might inform replication efforts or broader discussions about child support and employment and training policy?

At the same time, it is also vital to recognize that some issues of fairness and equity can be settled only through informed debate in the political arena. Any initiative that delves into the relationships between mothers, fathers, and children; society's ideas about parental responsibility; the welfare system; and the legal system is likely to confront, and in some cases conflict with, deeply held beliefs. This does not argue against pressing ahead – new approaches clearly are needed for the critical issues targeted by PFS – but it does suggest that this step should be taken cautiously, without unrealistic expectations, and with a solid research design.

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[4]An exception is Montgomery County, Ohio. In this site, the custodial parent partners of PFS participants are assigned to a single JOBS case manager, who works closely with the PFS staff. The intent is to tie the two programs together to create stronger incentives for both parents to find and keep jobs.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

CHILD SUPPORT ENFORCEMENT POLICY AND PRACTICE

This report emphasizes the institutional change required of local partners in Parents' Fair Share sites, especially the need to work with agencies whose missions differed, and whose operations, resources, and constraints were unfamiliar. For PFS staff from job training, counseling, and other human services occupations, learning about the CSE system was particularly demanding. The IV-D program is made up of a complex set of activities derived from federal, state, and local laws; these activities are often described in a language unique to the CSE system; to people in the "helping professions," the law enforcement orientation of the program is alien. Readers of this report who are not familiar with the jargon or history of the child support program may encounter similar challenges. Thus, this appendix is intended to supplement Chapter 6 by providing additional background information on CSE policy and practice.

I. Establishing Child Support Obligations

A. Child Support Guidelines: Three Basic Approaches

The Child Support Enforcement Amendments of 1984 were enacted by Congress to improve the performance of the IV-D program and increase standardization in the treatment of child support cases. The amendments required states to develop guidelines for use by judges and administrators in establishing the amount of child support owed by noncustodial parents.[1] Although the guidelines were advisory – not binding – this was a move to limit the discretion of judges and other officials who decided child support awards.[2] Prior to 1984, most state statutes enumerated some basic standards to be considered in determining the amount of child support awards, such as the financial resources and needs of the custodial and noncustodial parents, the financial resources and needs of the child, the standard of living the child would have enjoyed if a marriage had not been dissolved (in the case of divorce), the physical and emotional condition of the child and his or her educational needs, and

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[1]In the IV-D lexicon, "establishment" may refer to the process of determining how much money noncustodial parents are required to pay for their children's support ("support establishment") or to the process of determining who is the father of a child born out of wedlock ("paternity establishment").

[2]The discussion of child support guidelines in this section draws heavily on U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1991, and Takas, 1992.

"general equities." Nevertheless, determining child support awards on a case-by-case basis at the discretion of the judge or hearing officer was the standard practice prior to the adoption of state guidelines.

The states' child support guidelines were made binding under the Family Support Act of 1988, another Congressional initiative that made several major changes in the IV-D program. That law required states' child support guidelines to be uniformly applied by judges and other decisionmakers unless they make a written finding on the record that the guideline amount would be unjust or unfair in a particular case. States were also required to specify criteria for these deviations from their guidelines.

As a result of the 1984 amendments, states adopted one of three models for child support guidelines. All three give great weight to the income of noncustodial parents in determining child support awards, but they have varying effects on low-income parents. The most popular basis for child support guidelines, the "income shares" model (adopted by 32 states and Guam, including six of the nine states in the PFS pilot phase), adds both parents' incomes together, allocates a proportion of total parental income to the child (using as a standard the proportion of parental income that would be shared with children if the household were intact), and then divides the support obligation between the two parents according to their income contributions, crediting the custodial parent with her or his obligation. This formula usually varies according to the number of children. For example, in Ohio, the obligation is 20 percent of total parental income for one child and 31 percent for two children if the parents' gross income is $1,000 per month. When this model is employed, the noncustodial parent's income is the only source used to calculate the obligation if the custodial parent receives AFDC and has no other income.

The second most popular child support guidelines model (adopted by 15 states plus the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico, including the other three PFS pilot phase states) is based on a percentage of the obligor's (noncustodial parent's) income, and also varies according to the number of children. For example, the obligation is 25 percent for one child and 28 percent for two children in Massachusetts when the obligor's gross income is between $871 and $2,167 per month. In AFDC cases where the custodial parent has no other income, this approach to setting child support awards differs little from the income shares model.

The Melson formula for child support (also called the Delaware or Melson-Delaware model), adopted by only three states (none of them a PFS pilot phase state), is the most complex of the three, but accounts for the subsistence needs of parents – a key issue for low-income families – where the

others do not do this systematically.[3] Step by step, this formula allocates available income for the parents to first meet their own poverty-level needs; then it allocates additional parental income to meet the children's poverty-level needs, prorating the contributions according to each parent's ability to pay; finally, it requires any additional income to be shared with the children, using as a standard the proportion that intact households spend on their children.

While uniform application of child support guidelines may reduce inequities that arise from the traditional case-by-case approach, there is still room for considerable variation in how different states' guidelines based on the same model work out, and in how much discretion state guidelines allow judges or other decisionmakers in certain types of cases. For example, some states have established income thresholds below which judges and other decisionmakers are allowed more leeway in deciding the amount of child support than is the case under the guidelines; these thresholds usually produce what are referred to as "minimum orders." Other common variations in the basic models are the percentage of income parents are required to pay and the rate at which this obligation increases when income goes up, definitions of countable net or gross income, and the methods for treating medical support responsibilities, multiple families, shared custody, and residence in states with widely varying living costs. In addition, states and localities make different assumptions about noncustodial parents' ability to pay when they say that they are unemployed at the time a child support award is being set and when their income is unknown – for example, because they fail to appear at a hearing at which child support is to be set.

B. Exceptions and Variations

1. Minimum Child Support Orders. State child support guidelines usually address the setting of minimum orders even when noncustodial parents have no income or very low income on the theory that society should reinforce the principle and habit of noncustodial-parent contributions to the support of children, regardless of these parents' current circumstances. It is also presumed, especially for young parents, that the earning capacity of noncustodial parents will likely rise over time and that even full-time students and very unskilled persons can work minimum wage jobs for a few hours a week. Thus, child support guidelines contain varying provisions for establishing minimum orders.

Some guidelines fix the dollar amount of such orders – for example, at not less than $5 per week in Michigan and $50 per month in Ohio. For AFDC cases, some guidelines, such as those in

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[3]As discussed below, the subsistence needs of noncustodial parents are considered in many of the guideline formulas in a limited, case-by-case, discretionary way if their income falls below an income threshold.

Massachusetts and Ohio, base minimum orders on the amount that can be passed through to custodial parents who receive AFDC. Still other guidelines state principles for establishing minimum orders but leave the determination up to judges and decisionmakers. For example, the New Jersey guidelines call for the court to "determine the maximum amount of support that can be reasonably ordered without denying the obligor the means of self-support at a minimum subsistence level." The New Jersey guidelines further state: "At minimum, a specific dollar amount between $5 and $10 per week [per case] shall be ordered to establish the principle of the parent's monetary obligation to support his or her child and to establish a basis for an increased order should the obligor's income increase in the future."

2. **Handling Fluctuations in Income Due to Unemployment.** State child support guidelines typically address noncustodial parents' unemployment in two ways: (1) by allowing judges or other decisionmakers to impute income on the basis of earning capacity (as opposed to actual earnings) when parents are "voluntarily" unemployed, leaving to their discretion the determination of when a jobless parent could work, and (2) by setting standards for the amount of change in parents' circumstances that requires or allows child support orders to be modified. In Florida, for example, a 10 percent or $25 deviation between an existing child support award and the amount that the state's guidelines would yield, if applied, constitutes a substantial enough change to enable either custodial or noncustodial parents to obtain a modified order if they request it. In Minnesota, deviations of 20 percent or $50 require the IV-D program to initiate a modification.

The Family Support Act of 1988 mandated that, beginning October 1990, states have a system in place to review and adjust child support orders to make them consistent with the state's guidelines upon the request of either parent or the IV-D agency. In addition, beginning no later than October 1993, states were required to review IV-D cases at least every three years and adjust awards to keep them consistent with states' guidelines. These review and modification requirements were enacted primarily to help custodial parents get their child support awards updated from time to time to keep pace with increases in the earning capacity of noncustodial parents. Theoretically, they also move child support practice toward responding to decreases in noncustodial parents' ability to pay support. But the requirements present procedural and practical problems when noncustodial parents' circumstances change frequently. Pre-review and post-review notification of both parents is required for modification under the recent federal rules, requiring 30 days' notice at each step.[4] (The job

[4]57 *Federal Register* 61559 (December 28, 1992).

situations and income levels of poor fathers can change more than once in this interval.) Further, modification may not even be required when inconsistencies between an existing child support award and the guideline amount are below a stated level.

Between the three-year mandated reviews initiated by the IV-D agency, noncustodial parents seeking reductions in their child support obligations as a result of unemployment usually are required to initiate the process by filing a petition with the court or other agency having jurisdiction over their orders. Even in states or localities that have user-friendly *pro se* procedures for this (enabling petitioners to represent themselves before the court), the petitioning process can be little known or intimidating. Furthermore, petitioners are usually required to pay a filing fee; legal representation other than private attorneys is usually not available;[5] and federal IV-D funds may not be used to finance noncustodial parents' legal representation in these (or any other) matters.

In practice, noncustodial parents' inability to pay child support as a result of unemployment is usually discovered in the enforcement process when they have stopped making child support payments in accordance with existing orders and are summoned to hearings to "show cause" why they should not be found in contempt of a court order. (In states that set child support orders in an administrative procedure, rather than judicially, there are parallel enforcement hearings.) Across the country, a number of different approaches are used in these situations, but rarely is the deliberate (and cumbersome) review and modification procedure employed. In some jurisdictions, unemployed parents are ordered to seek work, and their cases are continued, with hearings set for a future date. Enforcement might be "suspended" in these cases, meaning that the fathers would not be subject to arrest or to some financial recovery procedures, although their child support debts (arrearages) might continue to accrue. In other jurisdictions, nonpayers who are considered voluntarily unemployed might be given a jail sentence or be required, in lieu of jail, to make a "purge payment" (to clear the record of contempt by demonstrating compliance with the court).

3. <u>The "Extras" on Top of Ongoing Obligations</u>. In some states, the child-support-related financial obligations of noncustodial parents are not limited to the regular (weekly, biweekly, or monthly) payments determined by state guideline formulas. In addition to the periodic maintenance

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[5]IV-D attorneys are barred from representing noncustodial parents because they are usually representing the state in child support matters (but, depending on the state, may represent custodial parents when their interests are compatible with the state's); public defenders or court-appointed attorneys are limited to criminal and quasi-criminal cases, which include contempt in only some states; and legal services attorneys usually do not represent noncustodial parents because of potential conflicts with their representation of custodial parent clients.

amounts ordered, many fathers of children receiving welfare are deemed responsible under state and local laws governing public assistance for the costs of birth-related medical services (sometimes called "confinement costs") and welfare payments made to the mothers before paternity and support obligations are established. Some states also charge fees for case-processing, court time, attorney services, and blood tests for paternity establishment, as well as interest on unpaid child support debts. As a result, noncustodial parents of children born out of wedlock to women who receive welfare and taxpayer-funded medical assistance can accumulate child-support-related debts of thousands of dollars before their legal paternity is established and an order for ongoing support is in place. Unlike ongoing child support, these extra obligations are not related to noncustodial parents' ability to pay.

State and local practices vary for fixing the amount of extra obligations, negotiating for settlement of such debts, calculating installment payments, and accounting for what is paid and owed. A 1986 federal law prohibits retroactive modification of child support orders,[6] for example, to reduce noncustodial parents' obligations after arrearages mount. However, the "state debt" that results from assigning the responsibility for pre-establishment public assistance costs to noncustodial parents is sometimes reduced to a judgment and may subsequently be settled by the parties, subject to the review of judges and other decisionmakers. Practices in this area of child support enforcement also vary. Often, the *quid pro quo* for such settlements is noncustodial parents' cooperation with the establishment process. Prosecutors and public attorneys are less likely to recommend a settlement of state debt arrearages in a case in which the noncustodial parent failed to appear for his hearing to establish paternity and support.

II. CSE Operations: The Regulatory Environment

As discussed in Chapter 6, federal child support policy has consistently and increasingly pushed state and local IV-D agencies to work a larger percentage of their cases, and not to neglect the less "profitable" or more difficult ones (that is, interstate cases, AFDC cases, cases in which paternity has not been established, cases with very young noncustodial parents, and cases with self-employed noncustodial parents). States have strong financial incentives to commit resources to IV-D programs. Not only does the federal government pay the largest share of the costs of IV-D services at any level

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[6]This was the Bradley Amendment to the Child Support Enforcement section (IV-D) of the Social Security Act. Prior to this change, 18 states permitted retroactive modifications, which in most cases had the effect of reducing the amount of child support owed. See Solomon, 1989, pp. 53-54.

the states choose to spend, but states receive incentive payments as well. They are awarded a share of their AFDC and non-AFDC collections on the basis of the ratio of their IV-D collections of each type to their total IV-D administrative costs. The higher the collections-to-costs ratio, the larger the percentage of collections states are allowed to keep. However, the range is narrow (from 6 to 10 percent) and even inefficient state IV-D programs receive at least a 6 percent incentive payment. The dollar amount of incentive payments for non-AFDC cases is capped at 115 percent of the dollar value of incentive payments for AFDC cases. This incentive payment structure is intended to reward CSE effort and efficiency without encouraging states to limit their efforts to non-AFDC cases.[7]

Federal regulations also encourage states to speed up CSE case-processing. The first step toward "expeditious" case-processing was a requirement, promulgated by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) in response to the Child Support Enforcement Amendments of 1984, that states file and dispose of child support establishment and enforcement cases (including paternity establishment cases) within set time frames: 90 percent of cases within 3 months, 98 percent within 6 months, and 100 percent within 12 months.[8]

A second set of standards for CSE program operations, intended to push the system further toward expeditious case-processing, was promulgated by HHS in response to the Family Support Act of 1988. Under these standards, CSE agencies are required to do the following in 75 percent of cases:

- Open a IV-D case within 20 days of referral from the AFDC program by establishing a record and soliciting necessary information, and begin attempts to locate the alleged noncustodial parent if his whereabouts are not already known.

- Access all appropriate sources of location information, including the Federal Parent Locator Service (which taps into the records of six federal government agencies, such as the Internal Revenue Service, the Social Security Administration, and the military), within 75 days of determining that it is necessary to locate the alleged father.

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[7]The complex formula for determining how CSE costs and collections are shared between the federal government and states generally favors states. However, because this split depends in part on each state's rate of federal financial participation in AFDC costs – which is higher for states with low per capita income – poor states have to be more efficient than wealthy states at collecting child support for AFDC cases in order to break even. It should also be noted that states are not required to reinvest AFDC child support collections or CSE incentive payments in their IV-D programs. Thus, at the same time that a state's CSE program is generating revenue for the state treasury, the program may be "underfunded" from a IV-D manager's perspective. This explains how CSE programs can be described both as "overwhelmed," with staff assigned to work thousands of cases, and as "moneymakers."

[8]U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Child Support Enforcement, 45 CFR 303.101 (October 15, 1989, edition).

- File for paternity establishment (or complete service of process necessary to begin establishment proceedings or document unsuccessful attempts to serve process) within 90 days of locating an alleged father.

- Either establish the paternity or exclude the alleged father within one year of successful service of process or the child's reaching six months of age.

- Establish an order for support (or complete service of process to begin establishment proceedings or document unsuccessful attempts to serve process) within 90 days of locating an absent parent or of establishing paternity.

- Take appropriate enforcement action (except wage withholding or federal and state income tax intercepts) within 30 days of identifying a delinquency or other noncompliance with a support order or locating an absent parent. When service of process is required, 60 days are allowed (or unsuccessful attempts to serve process must be documented). Tax intercept cases must be submitted to the necessary authorities annually.

- Initiate wage withholding whenever the amount of arrears equals one month's support obligation in older IV-D cases not subject to immediate wage withholding.[9]

- Report amounts of owed child support for the month to the state's AFDC program within 10 days after the end of the month and distribute the AFDC family's share of support within 15 days of receiving the initial payment or within 15 days after the end of the month if less than $50 is received.

In different ways. both sets of program operation standards recognize that some IV-D cases are more difficult to work than others. But they hold out timeliness goals for states' whole IV-D caseloads so that the difficult cases will not be entirely neglected. In effect, the regulations for case-processing set twin goals: Child support staff must, on average, both work all cases *and* work the entire caseload expeditiously.

III. Implementing Expeditious CSE Case-Processing

The regulations implementing the Child Support Enforcement Amendments of 1984 also

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[9]The Family Support Act of 1988 began moving the CSE system toward universal income withholding procedures, paralleling the income tax system. The first step, effective November 1, 1990, required states to institute immediate income withholding in all IV-D cases with new or modified orders. Old and unmodified orders continued to be subject to previous requirements for withholding when an arrearage occurred equal to one month's support. Effective January 1, 1994, all IV-D cases were subject to immediate income withholding. Under this procedure, a notice is sent to an obligor's employer regarding the amount to be withheld from his paycheck, and the employer is required to send the money to the IV-D agency on the employer's regular payroll schedule.

encouraged states to create nonjudicial or quasi-judicial forums to hear evidence and decide child support cases – a recognition of the speed advantage of administrative approaches to child support enforcement. About one-third of the states have administrative process statutes that allow the establishment and/or enforcement of child support orders outside the court structure. (In some states with these systems, all IV-D cases are handled outside the court system, while others use them only in certain cases or in selected jurisdictions.)[10] Such systems de-emphasize the adversarial aspect of child support and emphasize uniform application of program rules. Thus, in addition to being less burdened than courts with demanding standards of evidence and procedural requirements, administrative processes and their results tend to be more predictable and controllable – important advantages when program operation standards are externally imposed.

But administrative systems, too, may have difficulty with unusual cases, and they do not have the authority to effectively threaten uncooperative participants with severe penalties such as jail. This usually requires the shift to court-based enforcement processes. In addition, court-based child support systems usually have the advantage of guaranteeing a higher level of due process rights and opportunities for the parties to appeal decisions, which requires more time. Although judges may be more effective at compelling cooperation and safeguarding the parties' procedural rights, they may be less willing to conform to externally imposed standards.

In practice, many states operate hybrid judicial-administrative CSE systems, which have evolved to meld the uniformity and speed advantages of the administrative approach to the due process and appeal protections and authoritative presence of judicial involvement. For example, the state of Michigan's CSE system employs a first-level administrative forum to hear and decide enforcement cases; it is located in one of the IV-D agencies called the Friend of the Court and is judicially supervised. The Minnesota legislature recently passed a law requiring the implementation of an administrative process for child support establishment and enforcement in which CSE decisions will generally be made without holding hearings.

To expedite paternity establishment and support establishment (determining the amount of child support owed), many states have also adopted consent procedures that allow noncustodial parents to legally acknowledge that they are the fathers of their children and agree to a child support award without being served with a complaint by a public attorney or prosecutor and without having to appear in court as a defendant. As a first step, these procedures usually require that noncustodial parents be

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[10]U.S. Commission on Interstate Child Support, 1992.

provided with information about their rights and potential responsibilities, and about state guidelines for child support. Then they sign documents that are subsequently filed with the court or made official after a waiting period.

Where consent procedures enable the IV-D agency to expedite paternity and support establishment by avoiding adversarial process through agreements with noncustodial parents, default procedures sometimes accomplish the same purpose expeditiously because noncustodial parents are not involved. Under these procedures, when a complaint has been filed and substantiated and the noncustodial parent is notified of a hearing on the matter but fails to appear, judges or other decisionmakers may go ahead and decide the case, making a finding on the basis of the evidence and recommendations from a public attorney or prosecutor. If the noncustodial parent was properly notified, and a period to contest the judgment has expired, such *ex parte* (one-sided) establishment proceedings and the resulting judgments usually have the full force of law.

Another approach to speeding up case-processing is focused on how states and localities obtain effective service of process. This is the in-person delivery of legal papers; in child support enforcement, it usually means a summons to appear at a hearing scheduled for noncustodial parents to "show cause" why they are not complying with a child support order, which is issued in response to a complaint or petition filed by the IV-D agency. (The copy of the complaint or petition accompanies the summons.) In order to guarantee that no one is deprived of property without due process of law, state rules governing civil procedure require courts to exercise their jurisdiction over a person who is the subject of such a complaint or petition by ensuring that the person receives proper notice of it. This has traditionally meant that a sheriff or marshall or some other officer of the court must deliver papers in person.

People who are too poor to pay rent and who continually move around, staying for short periods with friends and relatives (like many of the unemployed men who are the noncustodial fathers of children receiving welfare), are difficult to serve. In addition, in jurisdictions where the courts are backed up with criminal cases, the sheriffs and other law enforcement officers charged with serving process may give lower priority to child support cases. To expedite service of process in child support cases, some states have empowered additional process servers by contracting for private service or deputizing CSE caseworkers and other administrative agency staff for this purpose. Others permit service by registered mail in some circumstances, and still others have introduced incentives for respondents to voluntarily comply.[11]

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[11]For a review of alternatives, see Harris, 1987.

In spite of the federal standards and innovations discussed above, "expeditious" case-processing in the IV-D system is generally limited to segments of CSE caseloads, and states are still reorganizing and automating child support functions and procedures in order to meet the regulatory requirements implementing the 1984 and 1988 reforms. The later standards, which states were to begin meeting in October 1990, were considered by many state IV-D administrators to be burdensome and costly, and HHS acknowledged that they would entail major changes for some states.[12] In issuing the final rules for case-processing standards, HHS pointed out that states with large numbers of cases per caseworker would probably not be able to comply with the new standards without adding staff and commented:

> The real challenge this rule presents most states is the need to review and in many cases radically change existing bureaucratic procedures. For example, a state which relies on sequential, totally manual, multi-agency transfer and review procedures for tracking payments and issuing checks will have difficulty meeting the 15-day deadline for payments to families even if it adds substantial clerical resources to each stage of the process. Substantial changes in handling distribution of collections, service of process, access to data bases used for location of absent parents, and other cross-agency functions and procedures may be needed in many states.[13]

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[12]54 *Federal Register* 32284 (August 4, 1989).
[13]54 *Federal Register* 32307 (August 4, 1989).

APPENDIX B

PROVISIONS OF THE NINE PFS PILOT STATES' CHILD SUPPORT GUIDELINES

Following are summaries of the key features of child support guidelines adopted by the nine states participating in the pilot phase of the Parents' Fair Share Demonstration. The summaries focus on those guideline provisions most likely to affect PFS participants and other low-income and indigent obligors (that is, persons required or "obliged" to pay child support) with children on AFDC.

Terms that may need explanation include:

Threshold income: The income level that triggers application of the guidelines.

The guidelines do not apply to cases with income below the threshold; instead, the judge or other decisionmaker is typically directed by the guidelines to use discretion or to enter a minimum order. The summaries list annual, monthly, and weekly threshold income amounts; the first amount listed is used by the guidelines, and the other amounts (enclosed within parentheses) were calculated by MDRC for ease of comparison.

Threshold support amount: The minimum amount of support an obligor with income at the threshold level is required to pay, converted by MDRC to a monthly amount.

Support as a percentage of income: That portion of an obligor's income that must be paid as support.

The summaries show only selected income levels in the range from the threshold amount up to about $1,000 per month. In some states, the guidelines themselves list percentages, and in others, dollar amounts are specified in guidelines. MDRC has converted listed dollar amounts to percentages for the following summaries.

Treatment of income below the threshold: As noted above, in cases where the income is below the threshold and the guidelines do not apply, the court or other decisionmaker is sometimes directed to use discretion on a case-by-case basis or to enter a minimum order.

Minimum order: An order entered against an obligor whose income falls below the threshold level, establishing a minimum support obligation and directing the obligor to pay a specific amount of support on a periodic basis.

Reserved order: A child support order reserving a support obligation establishes and conditionally sets aside a specific support amount subject to retroactive reinstatement if the conditions (such as participation in an employment program) are not met. An order reserving the issue of support allows the judge to defer consideration of support, while retaining jurisdiction over the matter.

Definition of income: State guideline definitions of income often are quite detailed, and are only broadly summarized in the following pages. Guidelines' definitions may cover assets, overtime and seasonal earnings, and stepparent income. The definitions also may include methodological requirements, such as a directive to average income over a year, which can affect a recently unemployed obligor. All PFS pilot phase states exempt AFDC, General Assistance, and other means-tested public assistance programs from countable income for calculating child support obligations. Although some of the state guidelines are based on an income shares model, the custodial parent's income is assumed here to be zero.

Imputed income: Potential income which is not actually earned, but which is attributed to an unemployed or underemployed obligor as though it had been earned. In practice, imputed income is often calculated as the amount of income an obligor could have earned from a full-time, minimum wage job.

In-kind support: Support provided by the obligor for the child's benefit which is not paid directly to the custodial parent or child support agency, such as third-party payments for tuition, or support in the form of goods or services such as food and clothing.

Modifications: Circumstances under which a change in child support obligations are required or permitted. Traditionally, parties to a support order in most PFS pilot phase states had to establish a "substantial change in circumstances" before the obligation could be increased or decreased. When states enacted guidelines, considerable litigation resulted over the issue of whether the enactment of the guidelines provided a legal

basis for modifying support orders. Currently, some states authorize courts and other decisionmakers to modify orders prospectively to bring them into conformity with guideline levels, without regard for the traditional "substantial change" standard, while other states have redefined "substantial change" to include a certain percentage or dollar amount variance from the guideline level. Federal review and adjustment regulations, effective October 1993, now require states to review certain orders at least once every three years and to reduce or increase the obligations prospectively to conform to guideline levels.

Multiple families: The following summaries indicate how state guidelines take into account other child and spousal support obligations in setting orders.

Traditional factors: Traditionally, the amount of child support owed by a noncustodial parent was left to the state court's discretion to determine on a case-by-case basis. In divorce cases, the judge's discretion typically was guided by several subjective considerations, such as the financial resources and needs of the parents and child, the standard of living the child would have enjoyed had the marriage not dissolved, the physical and emotional condition of the child, the child's educational needs, and the "equities" between the parties, such as the division of marital property.

ALABAMA GUIDELINES

Description of guidelines: Set amount based on combined gross monthly income.

Whose income is considered? Custodial and noncustodial parents.

Threshold income: $550 gross monthly income
($127 gross weekly income)
($6,600 gross annual income)

Threshold support amount: $50 per month for one child.

Support as a percentage of income:

Support as a Percentage of Gross Monthly Income

Gross Monthly Income	1 Child	2 Children
$ 550	9.1%	9.3%
600	13.7	13.8
650	17.2	17.4
700	20.1	20.3
750	20.1	22.9
800	19.8	25.1
850	19.5	27.1
900	19.2	28.8
950	18.9	29.4
1,000	18.7	29.0

Treatment of income below the threshold: The court may use its discretion in determining child support and establishing a monthly basic obligation.

Minimum order: Discretionary.

Definition of income: Gross income from any source.

Imputed income: The court may impute potential income if it finds the parent is voluntarily unemployed or underemployed, determining the employment potential and probable earnings level based on the parent's

recent work history, education, and occupational qualifications, and on prevailing job opportunities and earnings levels in the community.

In-kind support: Not addressed.

Modifications: The guidelines apply in any action to establish or modify child support. Application of the guidelines to the circumstances of the parties at the time the modification petition is filed which results in less than a 10 percent change in support is rebuttably presumed not to be a material change in circumstances.

Multiple families: Support paid by the parent pursuant to a pre-existing support order is deducted from gross income. If the parent is legally responsible and actually providing for other children, a pre-existing support obligation will be imputed and deducted. Upon a modification petition, no deduction is allowed for a child born after the original order, unless the support is paid pursuant to another order.

Source: Ala. Rules of Judicial Administration, Rule 32 (1993).

FLORIDA GUIDELINES

Description of guidelines: Set amount based on combined available monthly income.

Whose income is considered? Custodial and noncustodial parents.

Threshold income: $500 available monthly income
($115.38 available weekly income)
($6,000 available annual income)

Threshold support amount: $48 per month for one child.

Support as a percentage of income:

Support as a Percentage of Available Monthly Income

Available Monthly Income	1 Child	2 Children
$ 500	9.6%	9.6%
550	16.9	17.1
600	23.0	23.2
650	23.7	28.0
700	23.7	32.9
750	23.6	36.5
800	23.5	36.5
850	23.4	36.4
900	23.3	36.3
950	23.3	36.2
1,000	23.1	35.9

Treatment of income below the threshold: For income less than the guideline threshold, the guidelines specify that the parent should be ordered to pay a child support amount, determined on a case-by-case basis, to establish the principle of payment and lay the basis for increased orders.

Minimum order: While the guidelines direct the entry of an order, the amount is determined on a case-by-case basis.

Definition of income: Gross income less exclusions and deductions.

Imputed income: Income must be imputed when unemployment or underemployment is found to be voluntary, absent physical or mental incapacity or other circumstances over which the parent has no control. Employment potential and probable earnings are to be determined based on the parent's recent work history and occupational qualifications, and on prevailing earnings level in the community.

In-kind support: Not addressed.

Modifications: 10 percent or $25 deviation in an existing order from the guidelines may establish a substantial change in circumstances upon which a modification may be granted.

Multiple families: Court-ordered support for other children that is actually paid is deducted from income. The court may adjust the award for parental support payments regularly paid and for which there is a demonstrated need.

Other features: Detailed definition of available income. The court may set an amount that is plus or minus 5 percent of guidelines.

Source: FLA. STAT. sec. 61.30 (Supp. 1992).

MASSACHUSETTS GUIDELINES

Description of guidelines: Percentage of an obligor's gross weekly income, which increases with the number of children.

Whose income is considered? Noncustodial parent.

Threshold income: $201 gross weekly income
($871 gross monthly income)
($10,452 gross annual income)

Threshold support amount: $218 per month for one child.

Support as a percentage of income: 25 percent for one child and 28 percent for two children for gross income between $871 and $2,167 per month. The court has discretion to increase or decrease the order by 2 percent in consideration of the totality of the circumstances.

Treatment of income below the threshold: At the discretion of the court, but not less than $50 per month should be ordered. An order may not leave an obligor with less money than is required for minimum subsistence, including food, shelter, utilities, clothing, and employment expenses.

Minimum order: $50 per case. The minimum order is intended to correspond to the AFDC pass-through amount.

Definition of income: Gross income from whatever source.

Imputed income: The court may consider potential earnings capacity if a party is earning substantially less than the party could through reasonable effort, taking into consideration education, training, and past employment history. The court must find that the party is capable of working and is unemployed, working part time, or working a job other than that for which the party has been trained.

In-kind support: Not addressed.

Modifications: The guidelines, in and of themselves, do not constitute a substantial change in circumstances warranting a modification. Arrearages do not provide a basis for modification.

Multiple families: Support paid is deducted from gross income in determining a subsequent obligation. The court takes multiple families into account when the custodial parent seeks modification of an existing order.

Other features: The orders increase with the children's age. The guidelines are unusually simple and well integrated. They identify factors traditionally used to set support as principles considered in developing the guidelines. One principle is to protect a subsistence level of income of parents at the low end of the income range whether or not they are on public assistance.

Source: MASS. ANN. LAWS c.209, sec. 32-33; Child Support Guidelines, Commonwealth of Massachusetts, The trial Court, Office of the Chief Administrative Justice (rev. 1989).

MICHIGAN GUIDELINES

Description of guidelines: Percentage of family weekly net income, which increases with the number of children.

Whose income is considered? Custodial and noncustodial parents.

Threshold income: $169 net weekly income
($732 net monthly income)
($8,788 net annual income)

Threshold support amount: $187 per month for one child.

Support as a percentage of income: 25.5 percent for one child and 39.4 percent for two children for net family income between $732 and $1,174 per month.

Treatment of income below the threshold: The guidelines do not apply to a parent who earns $100 or less net income per week, which is considered poverty level under the guidelines. A noncustodial parent who earns $100 or less net income per week pays 10 percent of income for child support, irrespective of the number of children. The 10 percent decreases by one percentage point for every additional $100 earned by the custodial parent, allowing the noncustodial parent to keep 90 to 100 percent of poverty-level income. This formula is used until the apportioned amount approaches the guideline amount.

Minimum order: Not less than $5 per week, or reserved support (support that will be awarded later) when the noncustodial parent earns no income.

Definition of income: Detailed list including earnings or other income due from an employer, pension payments, social security, unemployment and workers' compensation, and debts owed to the payer less allowable deductions. Seasonal or year-to-year variations in income are averaged over the preceding 12 months.

Imputed income: Determined on a case-by-case basis where voluntary reduction of income or voluntary unexercised ability to earn is shown, considering prior employment experience, educational level, physical and mental disabilities, presence of children in the home, availability of employment, prevailing wage rates, special skills and training, and whether the party is able to earn the imputed income.

In-kind support: Support may include payment of health care, child care, and educational expenses.

Modifications: Upon a showing of change in the circumstances of either party.

Multiple families: Pre-existing child support orders are deducted from income. There are percentage deductions for other natural and adopted children living in the household. Deductions for stepchildren only if support is unavailable from the natural parents.

Other features: Detailed guideline manual identifying the underlying rationale.

Source: Michigan Child Support Guideline Manual, Friend of the Court Advisory Committee (rev. 1992), MICH. COMP. LAWS sec. 552.519; MICH. STAT. ANN. secs. 25.164.25.176 (Supp. 1993).

MINNESOTA GUIDELINES

Description of guidelines: Percentage of an obligor's net monthly income, which increases with each child.

Whose income is considered? Noncustodial parent.

Threshold income: $401 net monthly income
($92.54 net weekly income)
($4,812 net annual income)

Threshold support amount: $56 per month for one child.

Support as a percentage of income:

Support as a Percentage of Net Monthly Income

Net Monthly Income	1 Child	2 Children
$ 401-500	14%	17%
501-550	15	18
551-600	16	19
601-650	17	21
651-700	18	22
701-750	19	23
751-800	20	24
801-850	21	25
851-900	22	27
901-950	23	28
951-1,000	24	29
1,001-4,000	25	30

Treatment of income below the threshold: The order is based on the ability of the obligor to provide support when a net income per month is $400 and below. If the court finds that the obligor earns less than the threshold level and does not have the ability to provide support, the court may order the obligor to perform community services.

Minimum order: Discretionary.

Definition of income: Total monthly income less specified deductions. The court may deduct debts reasonably incurred for necessary support of the child or parent or for the generation of income. Three months' documentation is required; seasonal income is averaged over a year.

Imputed income: The court may impute income to a voluntarily unemployed or underemployed parent. An obligor is not considered voluntarily unemployed if the unemployment is temporary and will lead to an increase in income, or represents a bona fide career change that outweighs the adverse effect on the child. Imputed income is defined as the estimated earnings ability of a parent based on the parent's prior earnings history, education, and job skills, and on the availability of jobs within the community. The court may impute earnings from a 40-hour per week minimum wage job.

In-kind support: May not be offset against the obligation.

Modifications: A guideline amount that is at least 20 percent and $50 higher or lower than the current support order requires modification. The court may modify an unreasonable and unfair order, including substantially increased or decreased income, substantially increased or decreased needs, receipt of AFDC, or change in the cost of living.

Multiple families: May not be considered.

Other features: In addition to the guidelines, the court is required to take a list of traditional factors into account in setting or modifying support orders.

Source: MINN. STAT. secs. 518.551; 518.64 (Supp. 1992).

MISSOURI GUIDELINES

Description of guidelines: Set amount based on combined monthly gross income.

Whose income is considered? Custodial and noncustodial parents.

Threshold income: Guidelines apply to all income levels.

Threshold support amount: No threshold. If the obligor has $100 gross monthly income, the obligation for one child is $24.

Support as a percentage of income:

Support as a Percentage of Gross Monthly Income

Gross Monthly Income	1 Child	2 Children
$ 100	24.0%	37.0%
200	23.5	36.5
300	23.7	36.7
400	23.5	36.5
500	22.4	34.8
600	21.5	33.3
700	20.9	32.3
800	20.3	31.6
900	19.9	31.0
1,000	19.6	30.5

Treatment of income below the threshold: Not applicable.

Minimum order: Not applicable.

Definition of income: 1/12 of annual gross income from any source.

Imputed income: The court may impute potential income of unemployed and underemployed parents in appropriate circumstances, considering employment potential and probable earnings based on the parent's recent work history and occupational qualifications, and on prevailing job opportunities in the community.

In-kind support: Credited for expenditures made with the custodial parent's actual or imputed consent.

Modifications: Only upon a showing of a change in circumstances so substantial and continuing as to make the terms unreasonable. A 20 percent deviation from the guidelines amount is *prima facie* evidence of a substantial change in circumstances.

Multiple families: Gross income is adjusted for child and spouse support ordered and being paid. Consideration is given for direct support provided to other children in the custody of a party.

Other features: The court is directed to take traditional factors for setting child support into account.

Source: Mo. Rules of Civil Procedure, Rule 88; Supreme Court Rules, Form 14 (1992); MO. ANN. STAT. sec. 452.370 (Vernon Supp. 1992).

NEW JERSEY GUIDELINES

Description of guidelines: New Jersey has two guidelines tables in its court rules, one listing percentages and the other listing dollar amounts. The percentage table begins at $140 available weekly income. The dollar amount table begins at $160 available weekly income. They are roughly comparable.

Whose income is considered? Custodial and noncustodial parents.

Threshold income:[1] $127 available weekly income
($550 available monthly income)
($6,604 available annual income)

Threshold support amount: $45 to $50 per month for one child.

Support as a percentage of income:

Support as a Percentage of Available Monthly Income

Available Monthly Income	1 Child	2 Children
$ 607	8-9%	8-9%
650	13-14	13-15
693	18-19	18-20
737	23-25	22-24
780	23-25	25-28
823	23-25	29-32
867	23-25	32-35
910	22-25	34-38
953-1,040	22-25	35-38

Treatment of income below the threshold: For income below the poverty level, the court is directed to review the obligor's income and living expenses on a case-by-case basis to determine the maximum amount of support that can be reasonably ordered without denying the obligor the means of self-support at a subsistence level. A specific dollar amount of $5 to $10 per week per case, depending on the resources and living expenses of the parties and the number of children due support, must be set to establish the principle of the parents' monetary obligation and to establish a basis for an increased order.

Minimum order: $5 to $10 per week per case.

Definition of income: Gross income from whatever source minus specified exclusions and deductions.

Imputed income: The court may take underemployment into account. If sufficient financial information is unavailable, the court is directed to, insofar as practicable, make the award in consideration of the public assistance amount received by obligee.

In-kind support: The court may take educational expenditures and other in-kind support into account.

Modifications: Before using guidelines to modify a prior order, the court must make a determination that changed circumstances exist justifying a modification of the order.

Multiple families: Previously ordered and paid alimony, maintenance, and support are deducted from income. The court must adjust the order to ensure an equitable result to all legal dependents of the obligor.

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[1]The threshold is defined by the guidelines as poverty level ($127 available income per week as of February 1991).

The court must require full disclosure of the co-obligor's income to determine deductions for dependents from other relationships.

Other features: Detailed definition of available income. Underlying assumptions identified.

Source: N.J. COURT RULES, R. 5:6A and Appendices IX-A, IX-B, IX-C, IX-D, and IX-E (amended 1989); R. 5:6-2.

OHIO GUIDELINES

Description of guidelines: Set amount based on combined gross annual income, which increases with each child.

Whose income is considered? Custodial and noncustodial parents.

Threshold income:[2] $6,000 gross annual income
($115.38 gross weekly income)
($500 gross monthly income)

Threshold support amount: $20 per month for one child.

Support as a percentage of income:

Support as a Percentage of Gross Monthly Income

Gross Monthly Income	1 Child	2 Children
$ 500	4.0%	6.2%
600	14.8	18.2
700	22.4	26.7
800	21.4	33.1
900	20.4	31.8
1,000	19.8	30.7

Treatment of income below the threshold: Reviewed on a case-by-case basis to determine the maximum amount that can reasonably be ordered without denying the obligor the means for self-support at a minimum subsistence level; the court is required to order a specific amount of child support, unless the obligor is totally unable to pay support and the court deviates from the guidelines.

Minimum order: In July 1993, the Ohio legislature enacted a new minimum order provision setting a minimum amount of $50 per month, except that the court in appropriate circumstances may order an amount less than $50 or need not order any amount. Appropriate circumstances may include, but are not limited to, physical or mental disability or institutionalization in a facility for persons with mental illness. If the court sets a minimum order and the obligor is on public assistance and complying with a seek-work order, the current obligation is suspended, unpaid amounts due under the order are accrued, and enforcement is suspended. The new provision specifies that the minimum order amount will increase in an amount equal to any increase in the AFDC pass-through amount.

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[2]In July 1993, Ohio adopted a new guidelines table increasing the threshold income to $6,600, increasing the amount of support paid by obligors with income at the low end of the table, and decreasing the rate of increase in support orders. The new guidelines will not go into effect until at least July 1, 1994, and upon completion of a budget impact study.

Definition of income: Gross income from all sources during a calendar year.

Imputed income: The court may consider the income that a voluntarily unemployed or underemployed parent would have earned if fully employed as determined from the parent's employment potential and probable earnings based on the parent's recent work history and occupational qualifications, and on prevailing job opportunities and salary levels in the community in which the parent resides.

In-kind support: The court may deviate for significant in-kind contributions, including but not limited to lessons, sports equipment, schooling, or clothing.

Modifications: An order that is more than 10 percent greater or less than the guideline amount is considered a change in circumstances substantial enough to require modification.

Multiple families: Pre-existing child support obligations are deducted from gross income in determining subsequent obligations.

Other features: The guidelines are unusually complex. The July 1993 amendments deleted a list of traditional factors from the statute. Guideline deviation criteria are specified in the statute.

Source: OHIO REV. CODE sec. 3113.215 (as amended by Am. Sub. B. No. 115, eff. July 1993).

TENNESSEE GUIDELINES

Description of guidelines: Percentage of an obligor's net monthly income, which increases with the number of children.

Whose income is considered? Noncustodial parent.

Threshold income: Guidelines apply to all income levels.

Threshold support amount: No threshold. If the obligor has $100 gross monthly income ($93 net), the obligation for one child is $19.53.

Support as a percentage of income: 21 percent for one child and 32 percent for two children for all net income levels.

Treatment of income below the threshold: Not applicable.

Minimum order: Not applicable.

Definition of income: Gross income from any source, earned or unearned, less taxes.

Imputed income: Potential income based on educational level and/or previous work experience may be imputed if the obligor is willfully and voluntarily unemployed or underemployed.

In-kind support: Not addressed.

Modifications: The guidelines apply, but enactment of guidelines is not considered a substantial and material change in circumstances that would authorize a court to modify a child support order.

Multiple families: Not addressed.

Other features: The guidelines set a minimum base for establishing obligations. Stipulations may be submitted to the court for approval without a hearing. The guidelines identify six major goals, including (1) to encourage parents paying support to maintain contact with their children, and (2) to ensure that a minimum amount of child support is set for parents with a low income in order to maintain a bond between the parent and child, to establish patterns of regular payment, and to enable the enforcement agency and party receiving support to maintain contact with the parent paying support.

Source: TENN. CODE ANN. sec. 36-5-101 (e) (1991); Tenn. Admin. Rules, Department of Human Services, Child Support Services Division, chapter 1240-2-4 (1989).

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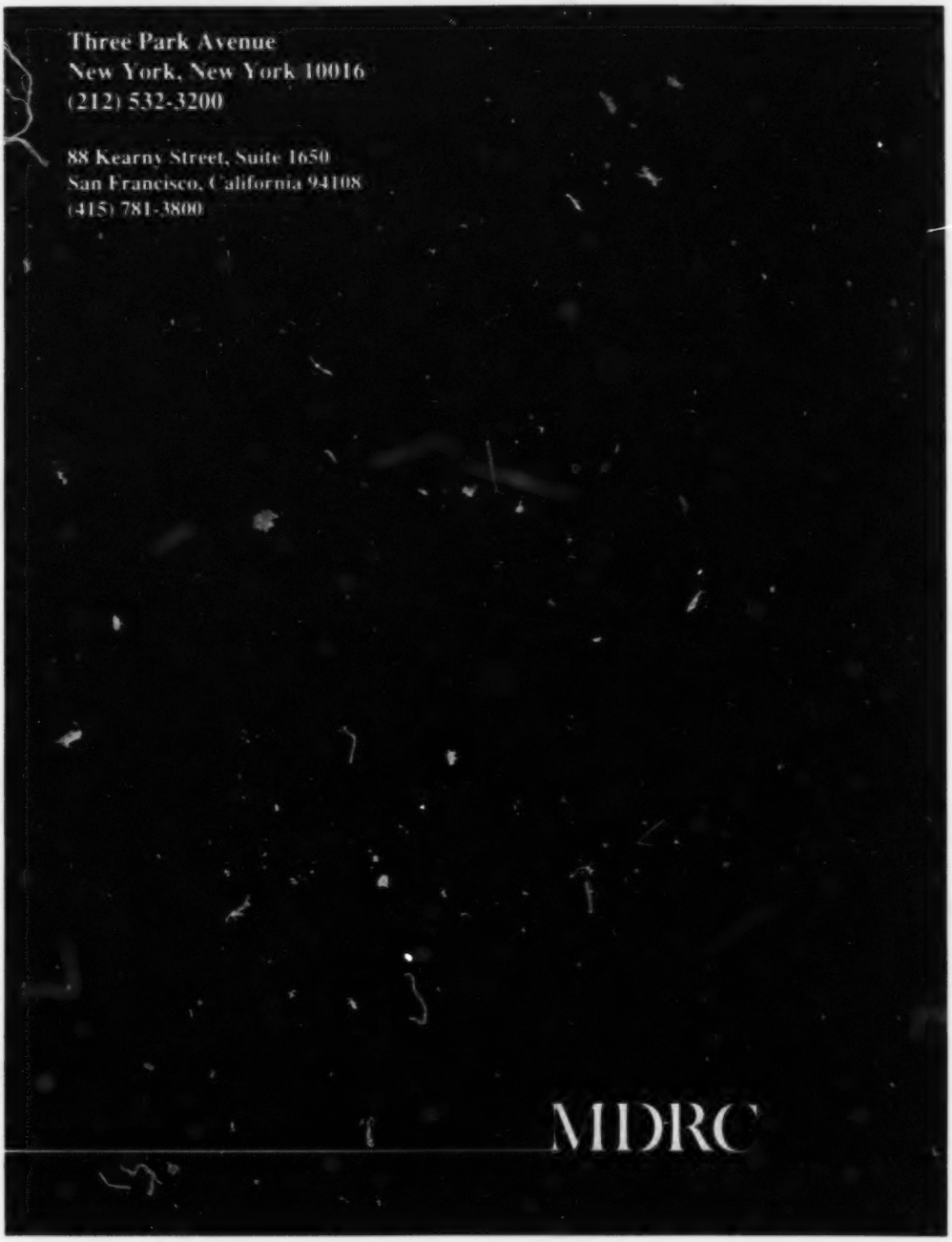
The Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC) is a nonprofit social policy research organization founded in 1974 and located in New York City and San Francisco. Its mission is to design and rigorously field-test promising education and employment-related programs aimed at improving the well-being of disadvantaged adults and youth, and to provide policymakers and practitioners with reliable evidence on the effectiveness of social programs. Through this work, and its technical assistance to program administrators, MDRC seeks to enhance the quality of public policies and programs. MDRC actively disseminates the results of its research through its publications and through interchange with policymakers, administrators, practitioners, and the public.

Over the past two decades – working in partnership with more than forty states, the federal government, scores of communities, and numerous private philanthropies – MDRC has developed and studied more than three dozen promising social policy initiatives.

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